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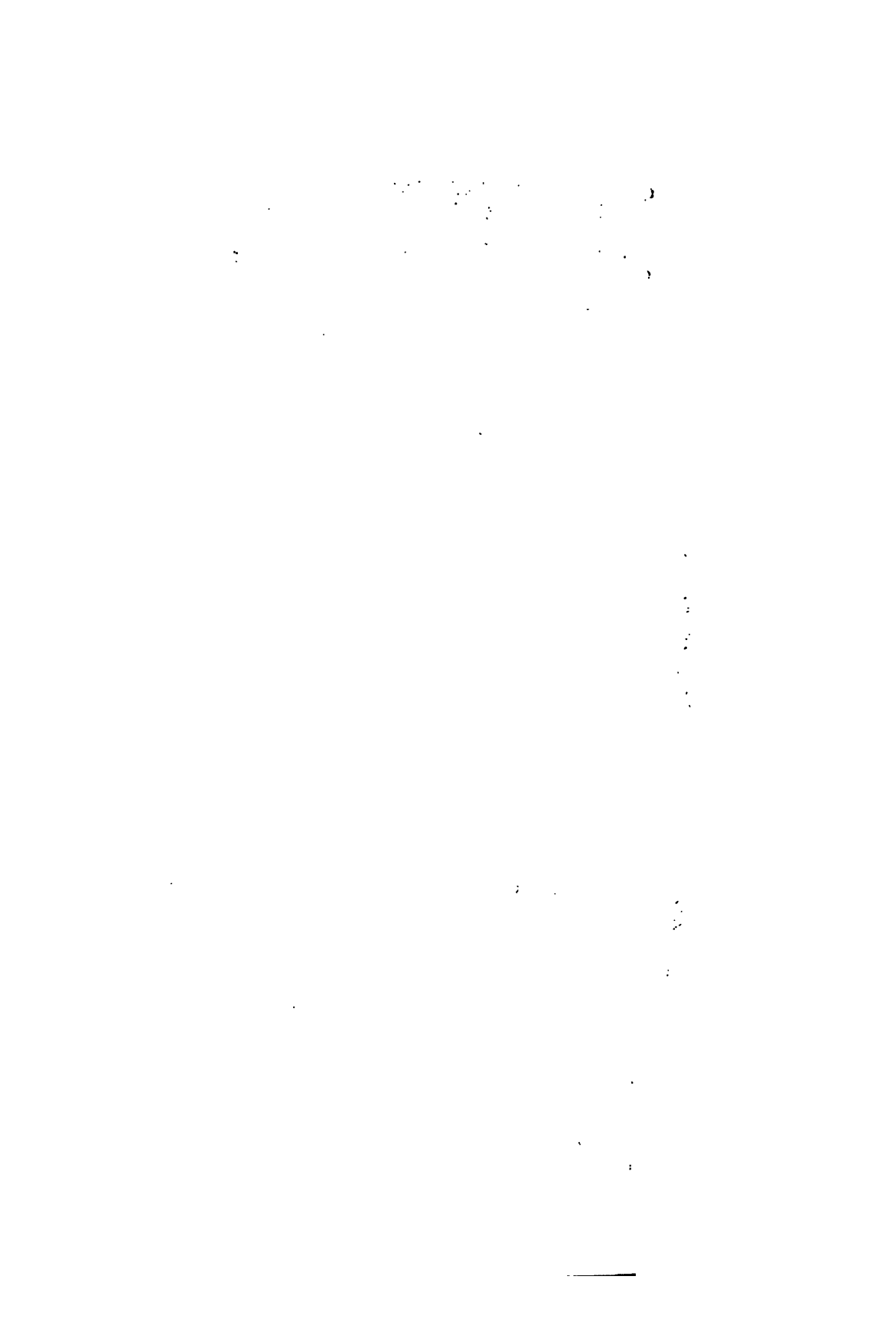
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THE PROCESSION.

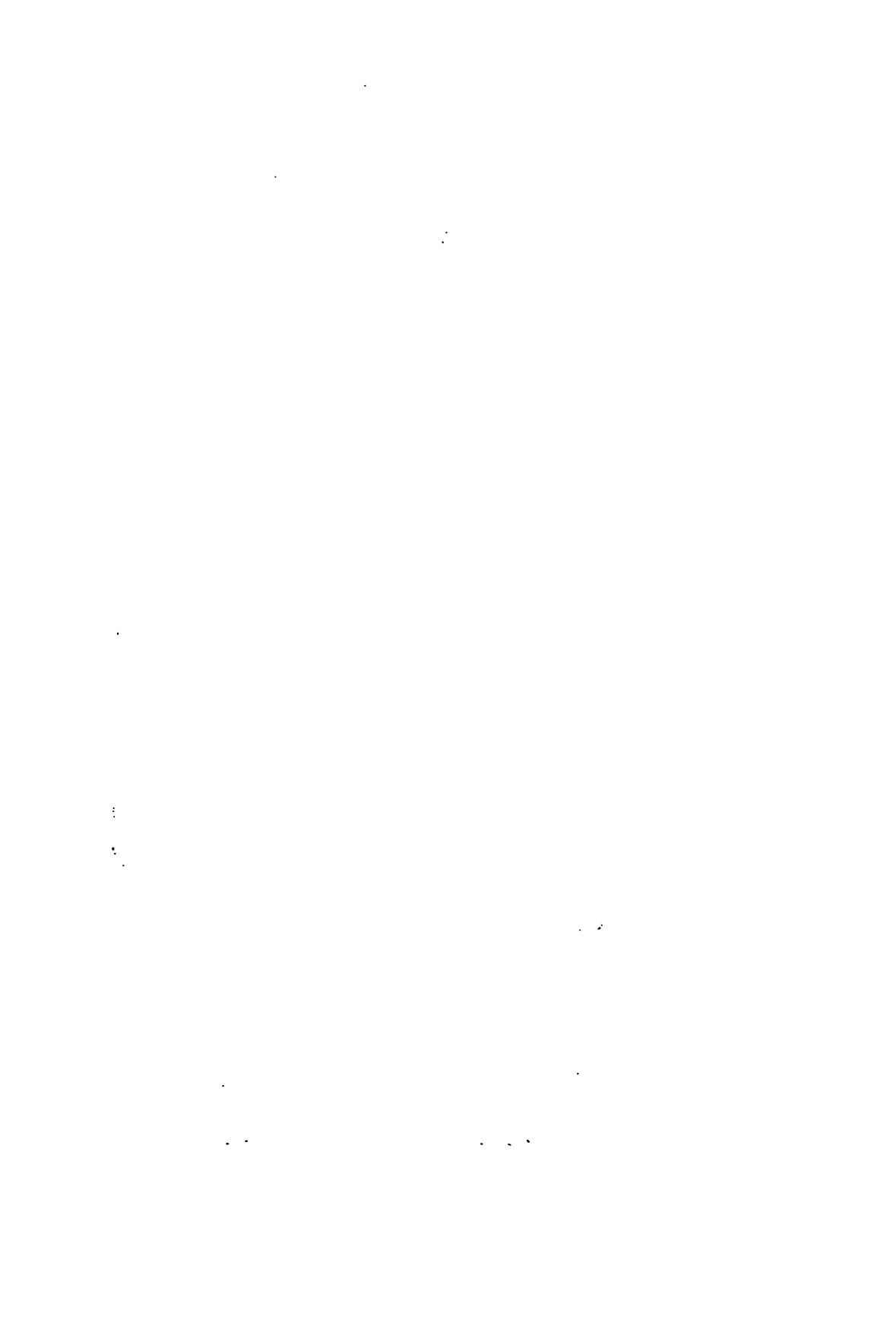






THE TWO CASIPETIS.







SISMARQUI IN THE PALACE.



1. The first part of the paper is devoted to the study of the
 properties of the function $f(x)$ defined by the equation

$$f(x) = \int_0^x \frac{1}{1+t^2} dt$$

2. In the second part we shall consider the function $f(x)$ defined by the equation

$$f(x) = \int_0^x \frac{1}{1+t^2} dt$$

MONTEZUMA, THE SERF, ✓

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REVOLT OF THE MEXITILI

A T A L E

OF THE

LAST DAYS OF THE AZTEC DYNASTY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'LAFITTE,' 'KYD,' 'BURTON,' 'THE QUADROONE,' Etc.

L.C.
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VOL I

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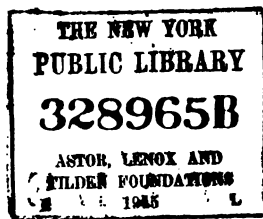
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Richard S. Weir, 25 Sept. 1945 2.

CHAPTER I.

THE PROCESSION.

'STAND aside, serf!' were the stern tones of an officer, addressed to a youth.

With a thousand others, he was watching the procession of the Priests of the sun, headed by the emperor and his nobles, on the way to offer sacrifices at each gate of the city, to propitiate the wrath of their Deity — for rain had not fallen on the earth for the space of eleven weeks, and the fierce sun had burned up the harvests.

The eyes of this youth seemed to be fixed more particularly on the princess Eylla, than on the spectacle, gorgeous as it was, with its seas of plumes and banners; its glittering helms and golden shields; its trains of knights in silver armor, and brazen chariots, with silken canopies of green and gold, containing beautiful virgins of the sun, glorious in their robes of white, and beaming coronets of stars.

'Stand aside, serf!' cried the officer a second time to the unheeding youth, and, at the same instant, the glittering point of a long, slender spear he carried, pricked the breast of the young man, who, ere it could penetrate, caught it in his hand, wrenched it from his grasp, broke it in twain, and cast the pieces disdainfully at his feet.

'Ha! It is the slave Montezuma!' cried the infuriated officer. 'He has mocked us full long. Cut him down!'

But ere the soldiers which formed the guard about the emperor and his daughter, and which the officer commanded, could obey, the crowd opened to the right and left and received the destined victim into its bosom.

'Hew your way to him,' cried the emperor, whose attention had been drawn to the scene, and who now beheld the citizens protecting the offender; 'cut the slaves in pieces!'

'Nay, my father, will you let blood be spilled on this sacred time?' plead the sweet and earnest voice of the princess Eylla, who, riding in the imperial chariot beside the emperor, also witnessed the affray.

'They are my slaves, and it is in their blood that I float above their heads,' was the stern reply of the tyrant.

'Nay, father! see how the poor people fall before the weapons of the fierce guards! And look! others, as fast as their fellows are slain, press up to fill the gap, and, with their devoted hearts, place a barrier between thy vengeance and its victim!'

'Therefore should they die for thus daring to thwart my will! On your life, noble,' he called to the governor of his guard, 'let not the insolent slave escape!'

'Spare him — O, spare them! For my sake, sire, bid them hold,' plead the princess earnestly.

'Dost thou plead for a few score bondmen, daughter! If I let this pass, 'he slaves will beard me on my throne!'

'Alas! such fearful slaughter!' she cried, covering her eyes from the scene. 'Father! Emperor!' she again exclaimed, falling at his feet in the chariot, 'shall Eylla plead in vain!'

'Ascala, call off your guards! Their insolence is enough punished. Hath the mover of it been slain?'

'Thrice he strove to force himself upon our blades,' answered the noble, 'armed with the pike-end he wrested from me, but the multitude held him back. Thou seest him standing yonder, taller by the head than his fellows, gazing on thee with defiance.'

The lovely princess had fallen upon the emperor's neck, as he yielded to her tears, and gratefully kissed him. With strange affection for one so sanguinary in his disposition, he tenderly returned it upon her forehead, and then sternly bade the procession move on.

But Eylla—for curiosity to gaze on a man, for whom so many had given their lives, had led her to seek him in the crowd, ere the noble pointed him out—did not pass on before she met, and received from the dark eyes of the handsome young man, a look of grateful homage and acknowledgment. The gentleness of the princess drew her as near to the hearts of her subjects, as the sternness of her father removed him from them, so the youth felt that it was no insult for his gaze, humble as he was, to seek the eye of the princess, and thank her for her interposition.

But the mischief that glance did, cannot be estimated! The princess Eylla rode on—but, from that moment, she forgot the procession,—her father—every thing but the face of the youth for whom she had interceded. Her mind, as she proceeded, became filled with curiosity to know who he could be that held at his command, and willing devotion, the lives of so many men; and then her thoughts run upon his lofty aspect and noble bearing; recalled his grateful, yet respectful glance; dwelt upon the dark fire of his fine eyes, and the expressive manly beauty of his countenance. But the more she thought, the more bewildered she grew, till, at length, recalled to herself by the approach of the procession to the Temple of the Gate, she hung her head in confusion, and concealed within the silken folds of her azure vesture the blush that crimsoned her virgin cheek.

CHAPTER II.

THE BALCONY.

In the centre of the present empire of Mexico, and within the borders of the beautiful country once inhabited by the ancestors of those wild and splendid savages, the Comanchees, lies a chain of elevated mountains, whose snowy peaks pierce the skies, leaving the vast fields of clouds floating midway between them and the plains. Towards the south they make a majestic curve, and enclose within their embrace a lake twelve leagues in circumference, on the bright bosom of which, like an emerald cast upon a mirror, rests the beautiful island of Alcolo, the seat of the Aztec empire. One of

these mountains, which is called the peak of Ix, is loftier than the rest, and on its inaccessible summit blazes a star-like point, which is said to be a single diamond. This glittering apex is here called the 'star of the Burning Stone.' By day the dazzling point glows in the splendor of the cloudless sun-light with all the dyes of the iris; by night its brightness is subdued, and its light becomes pure and pale like the chastened radiance of the moonbeam.

At the period of our story, this lake, with its central island and encircling girdle of bright, snow-capped mountains, was the seat of an empire now no more. From the midst of the fair island of Alcolo rose the proud city of Mexico, its capital, gorgeous with golden domes, needle-like pinnacles, overlaid with silver, majestic towers, and vast temples dedicated to the Sun, and to the god of war; while through it, dividing it into two parts, flowed a broad artificial river, which, for more than a league, reflected from its steel-like bosom continuous lines of temples, palaces, and edifices of costly grandeur. Here had been for ages the imperial palace and throne of the emperors, and here still was the centre of wealth, power, and regal magnificence.

ULYD, the last monarch of his race, and of the Aztec dynasty, now sat on the throne of this glorious empire. He was haughty, cruel, and imperious. His foot rested upon the necks of his many millions of subjects, and his sceptre was converted into a sword, which was hourly bathed in human blood. But EYLLA, the only daughter of the sanguinary emperor, was gentle as the dove in temper; fearless as the eagle of her house in spirit; as darkly beautiful as Lyn, the Angel of Flowers; and as graceful in form and motion as the antelope, that runs upon the mountains. The tyrant loved his daughter, and that love was all that humanized his nature. In one of the lesser streets of this gorgeous capital, near the water, lived a poor net-maker, Macho by name, whose sole merit was his honesty, and whose only income was the daily pittance earned by the toil of his hands. He had lost his wife, but Heaven had tempered its judgments with mercy, and left him a son and daughter, to share his labors and solace his old age. Montezuma, which was the name of the youth, was now twenty-three years of age. His stature was lofty, and his port noble; while the highest manly grace and beauty were stamped upon his face and person. His dignity was that of virtue; his beauty that of a gentle temper and a cheerful heart. He was doated on by his father, idolized by his sister, honored and beloved by all of his degree in the city; but despised, so closely had nature allied him to them, by all the nobles of the court. Such was Montezuma at the period of our story. His sister, Fatziza, was four years his junior. She was the loveliest virgin that bent her knee to adore the rising sun in all the city of Mexico. The night was not darker than her hair, nor the stars that gem it brighter than her eyes. Her voice was low and musical as the love-note of the Thu, when at twilight he woos his mate amid the dark branches of the zampzin-tree, and when she sang the groves that overhung the canal would ring vocal with the answering melody of the Tzire, the bulbul of Alcolo. She was as happy as a bird from morning till night, and her cheerful face, as she went about the humble but neat little cot of the old net-maker, looking after her domestic affairs, made glad the hearts of all who looked upon her: and no heart did her smile make more glad than that of her lover, Sismarqui, the handsome son of Ota, the renowned embosser of shields, who lived in the adjoining street.

It was on the same hour of the afternoon in which the events connected

with the passage of the procession through the street leading from the temple of the sun to the east gate occurred, that the beautiful Fatziza, ignorant of what had happened, was seated on the little cane-balcony, that projected above the sidewalk of the narrow street in which she lived. She was arrayed in the neat, virgin attire becoming her condition, and her dark hair, besides being plaited and bound with the usual fillet, was ornamented with a simple white flower of the *tepala*, for it was near the time that Sismarqui was wont to pass, on his way from the shop towards the imperial armory, followed by his father's two apprentices, laden with the shields that had been embossed that day. The little balcony in which she sat was not curiously latticed and adorned with pictured, silken curtains, like the more spacious verandahs that ornamented the houses of the better class of citizens, but instead was protected by a screen of green net-work, netted by her own fingers. It was now drawn aside, to admit more freely the breeze from the water, so that if any among the passing crowd should chance to cast their eyes upward, they could easily have discovered her; and many, indeed, were the enamored youth, that stopped to linger and gaze upon her beauty, as, unconscious of their admiration, she bent her face over a piece of useful needlework, on which she was industriously employed.

Let it not be supposed, that it was female vanity that brought Fatziza to sit so openly above her father's shop-door. In that paradisiacal climate, where the air is ever mild and balmy, where summer weds with autumn but to produce a spring of fruit and flowers in endless succession, the artificers, and humbler citizens of that degree, knew no other apartment in which to assemble for enjoying the evening time, than the light balconies that shaded their shop-dwellings. Here Fatziza had sat from childhood, evening after evening, and with a child's innocence of purpose she had now taken her accustomed seat there this evening. She expected her lover too; and at every third stitch in her needle-work, she glanced up the street to see if he was yet coming. The street was called the Street of the Net-makers, from the number of that craft dwelling in it, and terminated at the canal; so that her father's house, being the last in it, one end of it overhung the water. At this end was also a balcony, projecting from her brother's room, and which, by a narrow terrace, was connected with that on the street where she was seated. By going a few steps round this platform, therefore, Fatziza could command a wide view of the gay canal, with its gilt and painted barges, of every fantastic shape, whether of bird, beast, or fish, or of fabled monster, moving in various directions upon its placid bosom, and an extended line of the palaces of the Aztec noblemen on the opposite shore, with the Temple of the Sun rising majestically in the midst of them; while in the distance, the sky-piercing boundary of snowy peaks glittered in the beams of the setting sun, as if helmed with gold. But she had seen this scene every day of her life, and the canal had no charm for her eye, save when, at the monthly feasts of the sun, she could behold, as she had thrice done, her lover outstripping, in the aquatic race, fleets of competitors, and bearing off from the steps of the island altar, the silver ore with which the high priest rewarded the victor.

Her thoughts were running upon these achievements of her lover, when suddenly the sound of steel ringing against steel arrested her ear, and she looked up from her needle with a heightened glow, and with the exclamation, 'He is coming.'

But, instead of seeing Sismarqui, followed by the two apprentices bearing

the shields, she beheld a young cavalier in light court-armor, such as was the fashion for nobles to wear when not in battle, ambling on a black charger down the street, at an easy, careless pace, as if listless of his time. His sword, which glittered with its superb finish, and which, to show its matchless polish, was passed naked through a ring at his girdle instead of a scabbard, occasionally struck against the steel plates of his saddle-peak, as his steed slightly started from side to side at the sudden appearance of maidens drawn to their verandahs by the rare sight, in that quarter, of a knight of the emperor's court; and Fatziza knew that it was this sound she had mistaken for her lover's approach. Nevertheless, she did not drop her eyes again upon her work, but with curiosity gazed upon the stranger as he slowly came towards her. He wore an open steel helmet, fashioned like an eagle's beak, the symbol of the sacred eagle of the house of Aztecs, and shaded by a high and waving plume of snow-white feathers. His corslet was of the finest steel, and yielded like velvet to the motions of his body. Across his breast was bound a scarf of green and gold, and a short horseman's cloak fell gracefully from his left shoulder to his stirrups. On his saddle-bow hung a small courtier's shield, with a golden sun emblazoned in its centre. His steed was covered with a transparent silver net, that descended to his small symmetrical fetlocks, while massive chains of nicely fitting plates of gold ornamented, as well as mailed his chest.

These points of horse and rider drew but a momentary glance from the maiden, who was familiar with the town-costume of the emperor's knights; nor did the elegance of his figure, nor the finished grace with which he sat his horse, nor the perfection of his *manège* elicit her admiration; for she had seen cavaliers ride before as well as he; but what attracted her notice was, that he wore, dropped from the front-piece of his helmet, a curtain or veil of the finest steel, that concealed the upper part of his face as low down as his mouth, which was of a most beautiful shape, and shaded by a raven-black mustache. He wore no other beard, and his chin and lower part of his face were those of a young and very handsome man. This demi-visor was woven so openly as to permit vision, as his riding plainly showed, while it defeated the closest scrutiny of observers. This mode of appearing forth masked, altogether, she was aware, was not uncommon among the nobles and gay young cavaliers of the highest rank in the city, but there was something in the appearance of this horseman, that drew from the eye of the net-maker's daughter more notice than she had in her maidenly propriety ever before bestowed upon one of a rank so high above her. Perhaps it was that she regarded him with more interest, inasmuch as she expected, when she looked up, to have seen Sismarqui; and perhaps the extreme beauty of the part of his face visible beneath the mask, caused her eyes to linger with curiosity, — for he was indeed very handsome, so far as discoverable, — and a pleasant smile dwelt upon his mouth, as he paced along the close street. Fatziza did not reflect, as she gazed, that though she could not see his eyes, that they beheld her, unconscious of their observation, and rested upon her beautiful face with passionate delight. In a few steps further his ambling steed had paced opposite to the balcony; and the maiden, as if she *felt* the hidden gaze fixed upon her face, withdrew her eyes, and blushing bent her head over her work. To her surprise and alarm, the horseman, instead of passing by towards a shaded path, which led between a row of gardens and the canal, suddenly drew rein before the balcony, and laid his hand lightly upon the balustrade; for so low was this humble maiden's boudoir,

that, as he sat upon his horse, he was nearly on a level with her who sat within it.

'A fair evening to thee, sweet mistress,' he said, in the courteous, yet condescending tones, that became his bearing and her condition; 'Nay, I pry thee, draw not thy curtain. I would fain hold a moment's discourse with thee.'

'Nay, my lord,' said Fatziza, with embarrassment, and looking still more beautiful for her confusion, while her hand lingered on the band of the netting, which she dared not drop in the face of one so superior to her, even though his rude intrusion might well have excused her; but citizens of her class had been from infancy accustomed to imperial slavery, and were hourly exposed to the domineering whims and idle passions of the nobles, as well as to the absolute will of their Emperor. Her life was in the young cavalier's hands, and she trembled to anger him. 'Nay, my lord; I am but a poor net-maker's daughter,' was all she dared say, as she held the folds of the screen in her arrested hand.

'Therefore shouldst thou feel the more grateful for the grace done thee. By the bright diamond of Ix! thy eyes were never made to net coarse threads together into fisher's nets; they are snares in themselves, that should be cast to catch princes. There be many, both prince and noble, in Mexico, would come to thy net, fair fisher.'

Fatziza dropped her head at this language, and let fall the heavy lids over her dark eyes, till they were shaded from his view.

'Wilt thou then veil them, pretty one? Nay, 'tis too late. Thou canst not undo the mischief they have done. Pray, child, what is thy name?'

'Fatziza, my lord,' she replied, in a half-tone of fear.

'There is a sweet flower, called Fatziza, in the Princess Eylla's garden. It hath a tall and graceful stalk; and its leaves, of the richest coral dye, are folded two and two together, like a maiden's lips. Wert thou named after it?'

'Nay, my good lord; allow me to retire.'

'Stay,' he said, quickly, placing his hand upon her wrist with just force enough to detain her. 'What a moulded hand! Tezcuco, the emperor's sculptor, would give his famous statue of the Vichu for such a model for his chisel. Were the ladies of the court to behold it, fair maid, thou wouldst be the next virgin to be sacrificed to the Sun.'

Fatziza instantly shuddered, and the color fled her cheek.

'It makes thee tremble, child. 'Tis true, the divinity will have none but the loveliest; but it were a pity thou shouldst e'er be chosen as a victim.'

'The holy Avandu forbid!' she cried with clasped fingers.

'It is the holy Avandu, virgin, that alone claims such lovely victims as thyself. But I see it gives thee pain. Let us discourse of love. I have an idle half hour till the twilight deepen.'

'Nay, sir, I am but an humble artisan's daughter.'

'So, thou didst tell me before. Yet I would rather linger by thy balcony, and look into thy sweet dark eyes, and listen to thy soft love-keyed voice, than be the accepted wooer of any lady in the empire beneath the princess, who scarce excels thee in charms.' As the young cavalier said this in the easy, quiet tone which had characterized his manner from the first, he seemed to be gazing upon her face through the links of his mask, with bold admiration of the beauty he had so highly, yet so justly praised. Fatzi seemed as if she should sink upon the floor of the veranda, for she felt the danger of her position only as it could be appreciated by a maiden livi

beneath a government in which all below the rank of nobles were treated as serfs and bondmen, possessing no right, either in their persons, goods, or lives, and existing only at the caprice of a monarch, who, with his haughty court was only withheld by indifference or satiety, from violating every tie nature taught them to hold most sacred.

'Brave knight,' she said earnestly, while her eyes were fixed on him with even more eloquence of pleading than flowed from her lips, 'I beseech you ride on and leave one whose companionship, even for the idle moment you have given to it, will do thee dishonor with this noble princess, whom you serve, while the regard you bestow on me will but bring affliction to my father's roof. Go, I pray thee, sir, and take a poor maiden's thanks for the honor you have now done her.'

'Gentle Fatziza, this earnest eloquence of thy tongue and eyes for me to leave thee, is but flinging golden chains about my neck, to bind me closer. Ah, there is a *basalan* within thy window! reach it hither! Dost thou play on it?'

'To my father, when he asks for music,' she replied, overjoyed to be released from the hold he had upon her hand, even to get the instrument for him, which, fearing to disobey, she timidly placed in his hands.

He run his fingers lightly and skillfully over the chords of the *basalan*, a rude instrument of three strings, not differing much from the Moorish guitar, which was much used by the humbler classes, and said with a smile, 'Wouldst thou hear a knight sing a courtly ballad upon a *basalan*, before a net-maker's balcony, fair mistress?'

'Nay, sir, put me not to ridicule before my own townswomen.'

'By the star Ula! where the soul of music hath her abode—I do not mock thee, pretty mistress. Listen.' He thrummed two or three notes, and shook his head. 'Thy instrument is something rude—but if there be melody in the strings, it shall come forth.'

He then placed the lesser end of the *basalan* against his breast, and sweeping the strings rudely, but with bold and rapid touches, sung the following song in a voice wonderfully full of rich, deep melody:—

THE KNIGHT AT THE BALCONY.

PRINCE PALIPAN TO FATZIZA.

LADY, I love, at the deep midnight
To look on the glittering orbs of light
That burn in the heavens afar;
Their light is as pure as the royal gem,
Or the holy fire that enkindled them,
But thine eye is a brighter star!

The stars look brightly down on me,
Whispering of war and chivalry,
And glory's triumph car;
But, from orbs that so far above me shine
I turn to a beauty more divine,
To thee—a more heavenly star!

I have listed the clang of the trumpet blast—
On the foeman my breast I have fearlessly cast,
Uncaring for wound or scar;
But the trumpet is silent—the stars shine not now,
But thine eye—that clear gem 'neath thy beautiful brow—
Is a brighter and dearer star!

When he had ended, he handed back to her the instrument, saying, 'Now, pr'y thee, fair fisher's daughter, return me a song for mine?'

Fatziza had listened, till she forgot the unpleasantness of her situation, to the stirring song of the free cavalier, and carefully had he noted the effect of it upon her bounding bosom and brightening eye. His request at once broke the charm. She stood silent and hesitating.

'Nay, then, if thou wilt not sing, coy maid, then thou shalt kiss me.'

He seized the hand in which she carelessly held the *basalan*, near his reach, and drawing her towards him, rose in his stirrup, and pressed, ere she could escape, a kiss upon her mouth. At the instant of this act of knightly gallantry, a young man of a bold and free carriage made his appearance, followed closely by two apprentices laden with shields. His eye detected the purpose of the cavalier in rising in his stirrup, and, quicker than lightning, he snatched two of the shields from the packs, and struck them together with a loud crash. The sharp sound caused the horse to rear so suddenly, that, ere the cavalier could recover his seat, he was thrown from his saddle to the ground. On recovering his feet, he beheld the young man in the act of replacing the shields, which at once explained the cause, though not the motive of the rude clamor. He instantly leaped upon his horse again; and, with his naked sword, spurred towards him. The man instantly seized a shield upon which he received and shivered the blade, and, with his other hand, caught the horse by the head, and skillfully turned him aside from his person.

'Hold, Sismarqui! Harm him not, if thou lovest thy life and me!' cried the maiden, who had witnessed this from the balcony, and knew well the impatient spirit of her lover — for his eye, as he stood at the horse's head, was fixed on the knight with vindictive menace, and his athletic frame worked in its sinews, and writhed like that of the leopard-hound, ere he bounds from the leash upon his prey.

The cavalier to whom the words of Fatziza had given the clue to the young armorer's motive, in attempting to unhorse him, surveyed him steadily in his turn, and his hand sought in his breast for the short dagger worn by knights of his degree, which he half drew forth, and then replaced again.

'Not now, slave!' he said, in the low, deliberate tone of quiet rage. 'I shall remember thee.' Thou hast been full bold to unhorse a knight for kissing thy mistress. It had like to have been a dear kiss to me. Thou hast taken care, as I shall do, that it shall be a dear one to thyself.'

Thus speaking, the horseman turned and rode towards the little balcony, where stood Fatziza — pale, and anxious for the safety of her lover, whom she felt had, in one brief moment, created an enemy of the most dangerous description.

'Sweet fisher's — nay — 'tis sweet net-maker's daughter, I do remember,' he said courteously, yet with an irony in his habitual haughty manner he could ill suppress, 'thou shouldst have given me the song.'

'O, thou wilt forgive him, my lord?'

'He hath broken my sword.'

'He shall give thee another of his own make, of finer temper.'

'But he hath unhorsed me. Shall he put me on my horse again, pretty one?'

'Forgive him, sir.'

'Thou dost plead well and gracefully.'

'He is my lover.'

‘Therefore should I not forgive him.’

‘Shame, Fatziza!’ cried the proud young man; it ill becometh a maid like thee to ask favor of a knight. I scorn his forgiveness, and despise his hatred.’

‘Ha! this is language from a slave.’

‘Therefore do I use the only freedom a slave has — that of speech.’

‘Fair mistress, shall I forgive him?’

‘I need it not,’ said the armorer, fiercely.

‘Yes, yes, I pray thee —’ interpleaded the maiden.

‘Then I do forgive him, because it doth not please him that I should, and that I have a mind to do thee a kindness. His favor, sweet maid, shall hang on *thine*. So, if thou carest for him, thou wilt be less coy when next we chance to meet. Fare thee well, beauteous Fatziza.’

With these words, portent with coming evil to her, he gave rein to his steed, and riding forward, turned to the left, opposite the net-maker’s house, and disappeared slowly along a shaded path, between the gardens and the canal.

CHAPTER III.

THE EVENING SACRIFICE.

THE citizens who had been drawn from their shops and dwellings by the loud ringing of the shields, and had witnessed, with terror, the quarrel between one of their own condition and a knight of the emperor’s court, followed, in silence, with their eyes, the retiring cavalier, until he was out of sight: they then turned them upon the young armorer, with alarm and foreboding depicted on their faces. He stood where the cavalier had left him, with his arms folded moodily across his breast, and, with a dark and cloudy brow, gazing towards the point where he had disappeared. He was a young man, a little under the middle height, with a broad chest and a firmly set frame. His complexion was a fine, clear brown, his features decidedly handsome, and strongly marked with fire and intelligence above his condition. The carriage of his head was proud, if not commanding, and his step and attitudes were expressive of firmness and decision. His eyes were gray, and exceedingly vivid in their light, yet steady and resolute in their gaze. He was altogether, a young man of a bold and fearless character, impetuous in temper, and haughty above his station, as a bondman.

‘Why look ye upon me, fellow-slaves, as if ye expected to see the earth open and swallow me up,’ he cried, suddenly turning upon the crowd in the street. ‘I have had the boldness to speak to a knight, and lo! you stand about me, trembling like women.’

‘Alas, rash youth,’ said an old man, who was leaning upon his staff near him; ‘I fear thou hast laid thy head and ours upon the block; given our fair street to the flames, and our women and children to the lust of the emperor’s soldiery.’

‘He did but salute thy bride, and it were an honor, rather than matter of grievance,’ said a maker of lance-shafts, with a half-finished shaft in his hand, upon which he rested.

'Surely, surely,' echoed several craftsmen; 'and if we had not wives and daughters with charms to tempt a knight's lip, we would hold them little worth.'

'This is the spirit ye are of!' cried the young armorer, with a flashing eye. 'Ye are fit material for slaves! May your wives be torn from your houses; your daughters be violated before your eyes, by reckless nobles — and may you be so accursed as to grovel and thank them for the grace they have done ye. Ye are slaves — and slaves ye will die.'

The bold language and indignant manner of the young bondman, made every hearer tremble, and, interchanging glances of fear with one another, they dispersed, precipitately, in all directions, and, entering their shops, shut themselves in, leaving the young armorer alone in the street, with his apprentices, and but one of the citizens that had composed the crowd. This man had stood aloof, as Sismarqui spoke to them, but, on their timid dispersion, he advanced towards him, and said, in a low tone:—

'Young artisan — you have spoken the mind of many worthy citizens of Mexico.'

The armorer turned upon him, and saw beside him a stout man of middle age, the upper part of his person wrapped in the broad scarf of blue linen, that marked the caste to which he himself belonged, and wearing, also, the bondman's scarlet cap, and striped drawers. His features were bold and decided, and the aspect of his countenance was rigidly stern. He was a little taller than the young man, but less muscular and sinewy. In his hand he held a short oar, which indicated his profession as a waterman. Sismarqui surveyed him closely, an instant, and then grasping his hand, said, in the same tone,

'There are then three *men* among the serfs of the empire.

'Who is the third?'

'Montezuma.'

'I have heard the name.'

'Every man in Mexico shall yet hear it, from the tyrant to the infant at the breast. What is thy name?'

'Casipeti.'

'Art thou that Casipeti who yesterday struck the lieutenant of the king's guards, for attempting too free license with his daughter, as he was walking with her, across the Vanda?'

'I am.'

'Come in doors, and let me embrace thee! Thank the gods! liberty yet lives in human breasts. Nay, noble Casipeti — hesitate not — 'tis my father-in-law's Macho, the net-maker.'

'Not now, good youth. When thou wouldst find me, seek me at my dwelling on the stone bridge.'

Thus speaking, the citizen left him, and hastened up the street.

'Fatziza,' said the young man to the maiden, who had continued to remain in the spot on the balcony, where the knight had left her, with clasped fingers and tearful eyes, as if transfixed with grief, at his terrible parting words, — '*his favor, sweet maid, shall hang on thine, ringing in her ears.*'

'Fatziza!'

Thrice he repeated the name — each time more tenderly than before — ere she heard him. 'Go in, dear Fatziza, lest thy presence there should give further occasion for courtly insults. I will but go with the apprentices, and leave these shields with the armorer, and be back ere the sun be down.'

'Haste, Sismarqui! and, O! let me soon see thee; for I fear I know ~~of~~ what evil.'

'Thou needest not fear, dear bride; thy brother's arm and mine ~~are~~ thy defence against any danger that menaces thee.'

'It is not for myself I fear, but for thee, Sismarqui. Thou hast ~~ingored~~ noble.'

'A prince should not insult thee with impunity.'

'Thou art given to strange language, this evening. Thy quick spirit will bring evil upon thee and me.'

'Art thou sorry I unhorsed the knight?'

'Nay; thou art jealous!'

'Of my honor —?'

'Ha, ha, ha! a serf's honor!'

Sismarqui turned, like lightning, to see who had uttered this laugh and bitter gibe, and saw, near him, a tall, slender man, who, from his brown doublet, white scarf, and green silk cap, with a silver eagle upon its point, was one of the servitors of the Prince. He had just come from a small gate, leading from the street into the gardens, and bore a basket of garlands and fruit in his hand, and was proceeding towards the water side, as if to cross to the palace, when the words of the young armorer arrested him. From his swarthy complexion, deep sunken and glittering eyes, long braided black hair, and beardless lip, he was of the false and dissembling race of the Flascalas. Sismarqui gazed upon him an instant, with an impetuous and resenting glance; and then turning away, bade his apprentices take up their burdens and follow him.

'Stay, armorer!' he said; advancing a step.

'What would you?' Sismarqui replied; delaying, while the boys went on.

'I would know of thee, what is a serf's honor?'

'I will strike thee, thou Flascalan eunuch, unless thou pass on.'

At this instant the palace slave caught sight of Fatziza. Her beauty struck him with a surprise that he did not attempt to conceal.

'Ah! a beauteous virgin, artisan! A rare flower.'

'I will break thy head for thee, if thou pass not on.'

'Darest thou threaten one of the Prince's household?' cried the Flascalan, in a harsh, shrill voice. 'Here, sweet! there is a nosegay for thee.'

He threw towards the balcony, as he spoke, a bunch of flowers, which fell back again upon the ground. The eunuch sprung forward to get them, when the young man placed his foot upon them, and crushed them. The foiled servitor drew back, and looking up at the balcony, said, muttering, as if he had guessed the relation in which she stood to the youth —

'I will bring thee, bright virgin, a wreath from the Emperor's nephew, the gallant Prince Palapan, when he shall hear from my lips of thy charms. I will note the house well.'

As he stepped back to survey the net-maker's abode, the young armorer seized him by the neck —

'If thou darest to breathe to the Prince, or to mortal man, aught touching this maiden,' he said fiercely, 'I will tear thy heart from thy throat. Lo, see to it.'

He flung him from him as he spoke, and followed his gliding figure with his eyes, till he saw him get into a boat, and shoot out into the canal, where he was soon lost to the eye, in the gathering shades of evening.

'Alas! Sismarqui, you have made two vindictive enemies within the hour. Where will this end?' cried Fatziza.

'I hope in firing the nobles against the people—in rousing a spirit of resistance, among the five hundred thousand bondmen within the walls, to the tyranny of the thirty thousand who rule and enslave them. If what I have done within this hour but strike the spark of liberty, I am content my body shall kindle the conflagration.'

'Ah! Sismarqui, you love me not.'

'I love thee, dear Fatziza; but I love freedom better.'

'What hath given thee this mood?' she said, bending over the balcony, as he leaned against it, and taking his hand.

'The gods gave it me with my nature. It hath been in me from the hour of early boyhood. I compared my condition with that of the sons of the nobles. It was thus I made the comparison. My father had finished a shield of rare workmanship, and bade me take it to the knight who ordered it. At his palace gate, I met a boy, scarce half my own age, richly clad, and decked with jewels, followed by his tutor and two attendants. He asked me, pertly, what I carried; for it was covered with a cloth, to keep it from the dust. I told him. "Let me see it," said he. His authoritative manner stung me; and I answered, in the same tone, that it was a sight for knights, and not for babies. He instantly struck me across the face, with a switch he carried, and said, "Slave! dost thou answer a noble's son thus?" I would have struck him down, but two slaves seized me, and punished me with the *himboo*, till life nearly left me. I was then sent home to my father, with a warning never to speak uncivilly to a noble baby.' His lip curled with scornful contempt as he ended.

'Thy father should have taught thee deference, dear Sismarqui, and this would not have happened to thee,' said Fatziza.

'Thus it is!' he said, bitterly. 'We all, youth and maiden, drink it in with our mother's milk. There must be a new race of men, to know what liberty is. We have been begotten serfs and bondmen.'

'What is the dreadful purpose upon your mind? You are not yourself, Sismarqui. Come in, and let me soothe thy spirit. I will sing to thee.'

'I have no heart for music. Where is thy brother?' he abruptly asked.

'He hath been gone since noon. He said he thought he should witness the procession from the Temple to the Gate.'

'Is thy father within?'

'At his netting, in the rear shop.'

'Montezuma should be here by this time. Had he business?'

'To take a pair of nets to some one on the east side of the city.'

'I will call on my way back. I would see him.'

'Breathe not into his ear the strange, dark thoughts that fill your soul, Sismarqui. I would have my brother's bosom at peace.'

'It is at peace, because he hath not borne the wrong I have borne, by seeing his betrothed bride—the chaste idol of his bosom—held in the licentious embrace of a noble. I know Montezuma's spirit. It is kindred with my own!'

As he spoke, a lurid glare filled the atmosphere with a strange brightness, communicating to every object a pale crimson hue.

'It is the sacred flame. The sun has set,' said Sismarqui. 'Let us worship.'

The lovers reverently crossed their hands upon their bosoms, and repeated together, solemnly—

'The Sun, our father, hath gone to rest, that his children may rep'

upon his bosom. U-lu-la! Let us praise him. He hath made us. Light and heat are his. Day and night are his. We are his children; and he is our father.'

They then continued their conversation, as before.

'One spark will inflame Montezuma's breast.'

'Strike not that spark, Sismarqui, I pray you.'

'Nay, then, I will not. There will not be opportunity long wanting to kindle it from other sources. The nobles are becoming more insolent in these peaceful times, and the Emperor, for want of enemies to slay in battle, must needs have his thirst for blood slaked from our veins. All his court follow his example. Two hours since, I saw his guards strike off a young rhan's head, because, in his attention to a blind father, whom he was supporting across the street, he doffed not his cap to the Arikeve of the Emperor's stables, as he was prancing by; and when the old man fell to the ground, he was trampled to death under four score iron hoofs.'

'Fearful!' ejaculated the maiden. 'Alas! how shall this evil be averted from our heads?'

'By meeting it half way!—rousing the spirit of freedom in every breast, and making general insurrection.'

'Thou art mad, Sismarqui.'

'Keep within, dearest Fatziza,' he said hastily, without replying to her words. 'I will soon return, and ere I again leave thee, I hope to kindle thy spirit with something of the fire that burns in my own bosom.'

He lingered a moment, till he saw her disappear, and close behind her the door-like window that opened upon the balcony, and then, with a rapid step, followed his apprentices along the path leading by the canal, which had been taken by the knight, whose admiration of Fatziza's charms had produced such menacing results.

The cavalier had continued to ride on, after turning into this path, at the same ambling pace at which he had passed through the net-maker's street. On his left, luxuriant gardens were bending their branches, laden with fruit, to the ground; and on his right flowed the majestic canal, spanned by seven marble bridges, its surface covered with gorgeous barges, and its banks adorned with long lines of palaces, groves, and temples. Fishers, in their sharp, narrow boats, dotted the channel, or, having finished their day's toil, were spreading their nets upon the shore. Artisans and their apprentices were returning from their labor, or, loitering upon the shore, were observing the scenes upon the water, which was dyed with the rosy color of the west, and was so placid that every object was reflected upon it with the distinctness of the reality. Occasionally, a devotional song from a boatman, addressed to the setting sun, came across the water to the horseman's ear, strangely mingled with the shouts and laughter of others, the distant call of one on the opposite bank to his fellow in the stream, and the incessant dash of the thousand oars that were ceaselessly dipped in the water. The knight gave but a careless attention to these scenes, and continued on his way, until he came in sight of the stately entrance of the first bridge; when, seeing that the sun was nearly down, and that the iron gates would soon be shut, he spurred forward, and, in a few moments, cantered beneath the lofty gateway. At the portal he reined up, and called the captain of the barrier.

'Istalass,' he said, as the officer appeared, 'see that you keep your barrier with more than usual watchfulness. Drop your portcullis, henceforward, at half an hour before sunset, till further orders from the Emperor; nor rise

it in the morning, without first sending parties of horse forth to see that there are no bands of serfs prepared to rush in. I have seen a spirit abroad this evening, I dreamed not was in the four walls of Mexico.'

'Ah, noble sir! this news is strange. Yet, pardon me, I would do nothing without orders from the palace.'

'How, sirrah?'

'I do not know thee, save that thou art knightly.'

'True — I had forgot I was masked.'

He lifted his steel veil as he spoke, and instantly replaced it again. The officer placed his hands upon his breast, in deep reverence, and said —

'It is done as you command.'

'See to it — and should any disturbance arise in the quarter in which you command, be prompt in putting it down. From a lesser matter than I have seen to-night, got Peru once a new master from the rabble.'

He rode rapidly across the noble bridge, which was lined on either side with columns and statues, and entered a magnificent square, the four sides of which seemed to be composed of temples and porticoes. In the centre of the vast square, was a quadrangular terrace of alternate galleries and gardens, rising one above another, in a pyramidal form, to a great height, each story lessening as it rose, until the whole magnificent pile terminated in a circular altar of black marble, at an elevation for overlooking the loftiest palaces. Around the altar appeared a group of priests of the Sun, in white robes and flowing beards. Near its head, stood the venerable High Priest, clothed in white linen, and crowned with a mitre of gold, holding, elevated in his hand, towards the setting sun, a censor, in which brightly burned the sacred flame. Opposite the altar, on the west side of the square, towered the temple of the Celestial Deity, its vast gilded dome terminating in a single column of porphyry, of so great a height that it was visible from every part of the city. On the summit of it was a shield of gold, the apparent size of the Sun, by which stood a single priest, holding extended an azure veil, studded with stars, as if emblematical of night. In the midst of the square, and in the immense spaces between the pyramidal altar and the palaces surrounding it, was assembled a countless multitude, heaving, in their living motion, like the waves of the sea.

As the knight entered upon this imposing scene, the attention of the whole throng was fixed upon the summit of the elevated column. Suddenly, there arose a deep murmur from a myriad of lips, which as instantly ceased; and again silence, like the hushed stillness of death, reigned over the human mass.

The priest was veiling the sun!

The cavalier threw himself from his horse, and kneeled beside him, with his gaze, like all the rest, turned towards the summit of the column of porphyry. The priest was slowly elevating the veil over the disc of the golden shield, with the same majestic motion with which the sun, alone visible to his eye, was descending beneath the horizon. Slowly and gradually the dark symbolic veil covered the golden face of the Sun's image, till it concealed the upper limb, when a deep wail, like the articulation of a world's woe, filled the air. The whole multitude fell upon their faces to the earth. The High Priest swung fire from his censor upon the high altar, which kindled into a vast flame, of a bloody hue, and shed a wild crimson glare over the wide city; while the company of priests about the altar began to chant a religious hymn to their departing deity, while the worshippers, with whom

the knight joined, rising to their feet, chanted, at the end of every verse, a choral pæan of praise.

U-lu-la! I-oe-va! La! U-lu-la!
Praise the Sun! Hail the Sun! He is God. Worship him.

Priests. — The Sun is our father;
He made us:
We are his children;
We worship him.

People. — A-van-du! Ulu-la! La! U-lu-la. I-o-va!

Priests. — He gives us light by day,
And his heat warms us;
He veils his face by night,
That man may repose.

People. — A-van-du! Ulu-la-la! I-e-o-va!

Priests. — He clothes the earth with verdure;
He giveth the rain and harvest.
Great is the Avandu, our father!
Let us worship him.

People. — A-van-du! I-e-o-va! U-lu-la!

Priests. — He maketh purple the grape,
And giveth wine for the sad heart;
He melteth the snows for the thirsty herds,
And causeth the sweet grass to grow.

People. — Praise the Sun! Hail the Sun! He is God. Worship him!

While the priests were chanting, they continued to cast offerings of fruit, and flowers, and herbs upon the flame. When the hymn was ended, the High Priest stretched forth his hands above the sea of human heads, heaving beneath him, and proclaimed —

‘Though, my children, we are descended from the sacred and august Sun, who rules in the heavens and on earth, yet, through guilt, we have fallen from our original purity. We daily incur his fiery wrath, and deserve death. But he is pleased to accept the blood of kids and bullocks for the propitiation of our daring offences against his ethereal purity, instead of our own lives — asking human sacrifices only on festivals. Let us, therefore, be grateful for his mercy, and put our guilt of this past day upon the victim, that it may be accepted by him as a sacrifice in our stead.’

The High Priest then laid his hands upon the head of a white kid, which the priests led to the altar, and cried aloud —

‘Thus, erring children of the Sun, do I lay your offences upon the expiatory victim.’

‘Avenge thyself, oh Sun! upon the innocent victim, and not on us, the guilty,’ responded the multitude with one voice, falling upon their faces to the ground.

Instantly the knife of the High Priest was buried in the heart of the substitute of the people; and, after solemnly sprinkling the blood upon the four corners of the altar, he laid the victim upon the sacred fire, and consumed it.

As the crowd of worshippers began to retire from the square or court of the temple, and when the knight was also in the act of remounting his horse, to ride on his way, he felt a hand slightly pull his cloak. On turning round, he saw a stout man, with the lower part of his face closely muffled in a coarse

blue scarf, who, from this costume, as well as from the rest of his dress, appeared to be of the caste of the bondmen.

'What would you, slave?' demanded the cavalier haughtily, scarce glancing over his shoulder a second time, and placing his foot in the stirrup.

'Serve thee.'

'Thou art a serf, by thy garb. How canst thou serve me?'

'Both in love and revenge.'

'Ah! that would be rare service. Who art thou and what?'

'Casipeti.'

'The Mascak of the palace!'

The man hesitated — then replied in a steady tone of voice, 'even so, my lord.'

'What doest thou abroad in this guise, Sir Steward?'

'I have a purpose that I may not betray. As I came through the net makers' street, my lord, I witnessed thy passage of love at the balcony, and the fray that followed.'

'Thou didst! Well, what wilt thou make out of it?' said the Knight, biting his lip impatiently.

'A servile insurrection,' was the reply, in a deep, earnest tone.

'Ha!' exclaimed the cavalier, laying his hand with energy upon the shoulder of the speaker. 'I did have my own suspicions of this — I saw but a spark fly from the worse flint; but I have known cities laid in ashes by a spark.'

'Thou hast well penetrated this matter, my lord. Now if thou wouldst secure this rude fellow for thy own private revenge and his mistress for thy pleasure, I will aid thee.'

'I shall take my revenge in my own hands,' answered the knight haughtily; 'and in matters of love I need not thy assistance. Dost thou know me?'

'Thou art masked,' answered the man evasively.

'Thou shouldst know well the masker, ere thou ventur'st such freedom of speech.'

'Nay, my lord — for such I know thou art, though thy court dress of armor is unfamiliar to me. The maiden is surpassing fair and will reward thy dalliance. Thou knowest thou wouldst lose the favor of the princess by letting thy gallantry to a net-maker's daughter come to her ears — and, allow me to tell you, my lord, that open violence towards the young armorer will rouse a spirit among the artisans that will not be easily put down. No, my lord, whosoever of the princess Eylla's knights thou art, it were wise in thee to keep this matter under, for thou wilt thus best serve both ends thou hast in view.'

'Thou art a cunning reasoner — and wisdom as well as policy are in thy speech,' said the knight. 'What dost thou advise? The virgin hath rare loveliness, and, by the bright sun! she shall not become a serf's bride.'

'What did you purpose, my lord, ere I met you?'

'To despatch a troop of horse and level the street and bring both prisoners to the castle,' he said promptly.

And would the princess Eylla have countenanced the presence of this maid as guest of one of her knights? Even his highness, the Prince Pali-pan, would not dare do such a thing publicly.'

'Dare not!' repeated the knight loudly; and then directly added, in a different tone, 'perhaps he were wiser not to do it.'

'If, as it is said, he aspires to the hand of the sweet and virtuous princess.'

'True—true,' he said hastily. 'What dost thou now propose—for in that we have had conference thus far together, I will tell thee that I have love for this fair maid, and am resolved to bring her presently to submission. As for her fiery wooer, I shall have him presently seized and brought to my abode, lest through him, the matter of his wrong get to the princess' ears.'

'If your lordship will leave the affair with me to manage, it shall be done as you would wish within the next twelve hours.'

'What, pray, is thy motive in being thus earnest to serve a stranger? as thou knowest me not.'

'I have my own interests to serve also.'

'And would make me the tool to this end!' returned the knight angrily.

'Nay—my lord—what human being acts without reference to his interests? Whether I serve thee for gold or for hatred of thy victims—'tis the same to thee.'

'Be it so,' said the cavalier, mounting his horse. 'When thou wouldst communicate with me, send me, privately, this signet.'

As he spoke he removed a small ring in which was set an emerald, marked with some device, and placed it in his hand.

'To whom shall I send it, my lord?' asked the man in the low tone of one seeking confidence.

The knight hesitated an instant and then said, 'Come closer, and on thy life—look thou!—be secret.'

He lifted his visor and the man started back with undisguised surprise, then crossed his hands upon his breast, and was about to bend in deep reverence, when the knight caught hold of him and said sternly,

'Wouldst thou already expose it to these about here? Go, and serve me with thy best wit and caution. Thou hast shown thyself to possess a wisdom during this conference that I shall need make use of in time to come. It is therefore I would that thou shouldst now know me.'

As the knight ended he struck his spurs into the flank of his impatient steed and galloped forward in the direction of one of the four great avenues that led from the angles of the square to the four quarters of the city. The man looked after him for a moment with the smile of one who has succeeded beyond his hopes in some hidden purpose; then examining the ring he placed it upon his finger, and gathered his scarf about his breast and face. He then walked rapidly away, in an opposite direction, towards the canal, and was soon lost in the crowd that thronged its bank, enjoying the evening breeze from the encircling lake and listening to the sound of music that came from the numerous pleasure barges of the nobles, that floated like fairy palaces upon its transparent bosom.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HUNCHBACK.

THE roseate tinge of twilight still lingered on the water, when a small fisher's boat, containing two persons, was seen pulling easily along the pier of columns that terminated the grounds of the Imperial palace on the side of

the canal opposite to the net-maker's street. One of the individuals, who was seated on the centre thwart of the boat and rowing, was a hunchback : but his face was like a woman's, for its soft beauty, and his hair flowed in luxuriant tresses about his high, massive shoulders. His eyes were very large and deeply set, and shot forth the most penetrating glances in a direct line. His spirit looked visibly forth from them. They seemed literally to blaze like lamps with the intensity of the intellectual fire pent within, and that was consuming them.

The other individual was an old man, with a flowing beard, that rendered his appearance strikingly venerable. The boat was very humble in its character as also was the appearance of its occupants. They both wore the coarse, blue scarf, scarlet cap, and striped fringed drawers, peculiar to the lower castes of the Mexitili, save that the habit of the younger was fashioned with more taste than the elder's, and notwithstanding his deformity, worn with pretension to youthful grace. In the folds across his breast was placed a sprig of the delicately-leaved plant of the Ute, as if there belonged to him a grace of mind and refinement of taste singularly in contrast with the appearance of his person. A net and a few fishes lay in the bottom of the boat ; a small awning was spread above the stern, where the old man was seated, and the bows were ornamented with the rude representation carved in wood, of a horse's head. The little boat moved steadily on, amid a multitude of others, darting swiftly in every direction, and at intervals the youth, who was rowing, would chant a verse of some hymn to the protecting spirit of the water. At length they came opposite the entrance to the palace, when he ceased rowing and gazed upon it. It rose from the shore, terrace above terrace, supported by slender white marble columns, with gilded capitals, till it terminated in a stately pile of imperial magnificence and grandeur that rivalled even the Temple of the Sun, which stood near, itself appearing a city of Grecian domes, and marble towers, and silver spires, mingled with gardens, fountains, and lofty burnished altars, every point and pinnacle glittering with precious stones.

'Father,' said the young man, after having for a few moments surveyed the gorgeous palace of the emperor, 'how many million human lives have been sacrificed to build up that mountain of laid gold and columned marble ?'

'How mean you, my son ?' asked the old man ; 't is built of gold and marble, as thou seest, and not of men's lives. Pull on a little further and then we shall be high enough to take the current across to our street. 'T is getting late.'

'I can imagine, father,' continued the young man, without regarding his words, and gazing thoughtfully upon the structure, 'I can imagine each fair polished stone to be the skull of a man, like you and me, each diamond to be a human eye, and every column and glorious ornament to be a human limb. It is a palace of dead men's bones — and these men were our brothers — our fellow-bondmen.'

'T is said that three millions of the emperor's subjects died in erecting it, my son, if that is what you mean — but their lives were his and not their own.'

'Is *thy* life, father, thine own ?' asked the youth with bitterness.

'Till the emperor bid me give it up for his pleasure.'

'Ulyd is but a man like thyself !'

'He is the brother of the Sun.'

'And thou and I are *children* of the Sun. Which hath the more honor — the son or the brother ?'

'Hist, boy. Thou art mad. Thy language will be taken up by passing boats.'

'And what would be the end of it?' he enquired scornfully, and his glance kindling.

'The loss of thy head and thy father's.'

'May not the emperor take them at any moment if he will? Is it not better to die having done worthy of death, than be slain like a sheep at another's will? Father, I am tired of being a serf.'

'If thy tongue cuts thus, thou wilt not have long space to lament thy weariness,' exclaimed the old man in alarm. 'Hush, I bid thee! Take thine oar — or yonder barge will come upon us and bear us down, and thou knowest these nobles care little for a poor fisher's life.'

'Thou hast it! *That* is what I would have thee dwell upon in thy heart, father,' said the hunchback, as the boat, obedient to a few strokes of his oars, shot aside while a gay pleasure barge darted past like an arrow. 'I would have this feeling of the cheapness of our lives impressed on every mind in Mexico, till she free herself in her might from this accursed vassalage. Heaven made not me a slave — to wear this scarlet badge of servitude upon my head, and this scarf across my body — and that haughty young cavalier, standing on yonder prow, in silk and gold, to bid me crouch, and kneel, stand aside or even slay myself at his bidding. I have a man's frame and form as well as he. I speak, eat, move, as he does — love and hate as he does — in short, I am a man, and he is no more.'

'Thou art hunchback, boy.' 'The gods made me not so.' 'No — thou wert born fair and perfect — but it was a knight in sport tossed his shield upon thee when thou wert an infant lying on the ground before the door.'

'Would to the just gods I knew this cavalier! I would slay him were he prince Palipan.'

'Thou art most surely mad, Hucha,' cried the old man, trembling from head to foot. 'Thou wilt, with thy hasty words, one day thrust thyself into the way of death; and what will become of thy poor father.'

'Die also, old man! 'T were better to die than live.'

'And Fatziza! Dost thou forget thy cousin, Fatziza?' plead the old man mournfully.

'She, alas! were better dead than what she is, for her beauty will yet assuredly bring to her young bosom, woe and misery I dare not think upon. Besides,' he said in a sad, bitter tone, 'she loves me not. I am Hucha, the hunchback.'

As he spoke, he once more resumed his oars and was pulling along the pier as before, when a glittering barge, with a silver prow and a shield above the stern like the sun, gorgeous with crimson curtains and gilded canopies, from which floated the sound of music mingled with gay voices of laughter, came bearing down, impelled by fifty oars. It was the barge he had alluded to, and on her prow stood the cavalier he had contrasted with himself.

'Ply the oar, boy!' cried the old man. At this instant they heard the noble say, laughing, 'Lo, yonder is a hunchback! he will fright our court ladies and transfer the nobility. Besides, he is loitering in our course. Pass on over him!'

The young man bent to the oar, for he saw the imminent danger and cleared her arrowing and slightly deviating path just in time to escape being struck by her bows, but fell upon the sweeps of the oars-men. 'Knock the slaves on the head and sink their boat,' cried the noble, as the skiff became en-

tangled among the sweeps. 'It will teach these fellows better than to obstruct a knight's pleasure barge.'

The oars-men instantly upset the boat and threw them both out into the water. The old man would have sunk, for he had been stunned by a blow dealt from one of the sweeps, but for the aid of his son, who held him up with one arm, while with the other he clung to one of the oars held by the rowers and which were chained to the ports. Their weight depressed the barge, and the noble sprung towards them with his sword drawn and cried sternly,

'Leave thy hold, hunchback!'

'It is my father here, my lord, whom I would save.'

The noble without replying, aimed a blow at his hand, with his weapon, when he released his grasp and let the barge pass on leaving him swimming and with difficulty keeping the old man's head above water. Two or three skiffs were flying to their assistance, when the barge rounded to and the nobleman with his friends gathered around him, forbade any one to help them, while he looked on to witness the result as a novel species of entertainment.

'Thou dost buffet bravely, hunchback!' he cried with irony. 'His shoulders hold wind,' cried another. 'Take the old man on thy back, Sir Hunchback,' mocked a third cavalier.

The old man soon recovered his senses and greatly relieved the young man of his burden by aiding himself.

'Father,' said the young man, as he saw that he could do without his assistance, 'I would sink to my grave now most willingly, did I not hope to live to avenge this wrong. That gray knight, Guichapa, standing on the stern, shall repent his pleasant sport.'

'He it was, boy, that cast the shield on thee!' said the old man looking.

'Then the gods help me to swim — for I will not die now.'

They slowly made their way towards the shore, when, as if wearied of the delay, the noble, after one or two more insulting jeers, bade his barge move on its way again, and left them to their fate. At this moment a light boat, with a garland on its stern, pulled by a single man, passed so near them that the oars were within reach of the young man's grasp.

'I pray thee, brother,' he said, 'take this old man from the water.'

'Brother me no brother, slave,' said the rower, in a shrill, sharp key. And turning his face towards the hunchback he showed the swart features and glittering eye of the Flascalan.

'Thou hast well said it, eunuch. Pass on,' cried Hucha, withdrawing his hold upon the side of the boat. 'I would rather trust to the water than to one of thy race.'

The Flascalan struck the young man a sharp blow upon the shoulders, accompanied with a laugh of derision, and continued on his way across the canal.

The barge had scarcely got twenty yards away, when several boats of their own craft came to their assistance and took them on board. The hunchback sat silent until they landed not far from the net-makers' street, and then touching a lad on the shoulder who had pulled one of the boats, called him aside and said to him,

'Go, see my father home, Tripeti, and stay there until I come, which will be shortly. Go. I have matters that will keep me abroad awhile.'

Having seen him depart as he had directed, the hunchback turned to the boatmen and a group of others who stood round him and said —

'My friends, you have done me service in saving me and my father. If

the gods will, I will do you a service in return which shall compensate you and your children's children after you.'

'We need none, good Hucha,' said they all. 'We are happy to have saved you, for you are like a son and a brother to us.'

'Am I indeed so loved?' he inquired with feeling—'then show all your love for me,' he added with enthusiasm, 'by being ready to stand by me when I shall call upon you.'

'What does your language and manner import?' they asked with surprise. 'Is there a man here that hath not had some injury at the hand of the troubles?'

'Hush, young man! This is rash language here,' said a staid old boatman, laying his hand rudely upon him.

'Answer me! Have ye not been wronged?' he repeated without regarding the warning. 'Nay—then gather about me and I will speak to thee in a slave's tone. My fellow bondmen,' he said, as they drew near him, 'I will answer for you to a man. Here stands Harani, the refiner, whose eldest boy was impaled for striking a Flascalan who would have dragged off his sweet-heart to a nobleman's harem. Here stands Uzman, the waterman, whose young bride was rifled from his nuptial couch, ere he had pressed it, by a lieutenant of the Emperor's guards. I see here Pireni, the silver-smith, who lay in the dungeons of the castle three years, till his last *zu* of silver was tortured from him. I see here Hurequa, the barge-keeper, Emha, Corb and Zacuri, who have each been victims of oppression.' He paused and looked round upon them.

There was a low but unanimous assent.

'This, then, you feel, and dare acknowledge. Thank the gods for this one step. How many of ourselves, think you, brethren, are there in Mexico that endure bondage?'

'One million, perhaps,' answered several.

'And thirty thousand nobles, who are the masters, with the tyrant, Ulyd, at their head.'

'What will this drift to?' asked one of the fishermen, cautiously, of his fellow.

'It will drift,' answered the young man, whose quick ear had overheard this, 'to placing this million in the possession of their natural rights, which these thirty thousand nobles unjustly withhold from them. We are men as well as they. They have no right over our lives and liberties. Let us, then, assert them, and break those chains that shackle us. As for me, I am resolved to be free. The first blow will soon be struck. The time is ripening; and, then, when you hear the call upon you—rise, freemen!'

The young man turned and walked away, leaving them gazing upon each other, in mute surprise, fear, and wonder. The Mexicans had, for several centuries, been under the sanguinary yoke of the most degrading servitude, to an aristocracy that haughtily imagined them to belong to an inferior species to themselves. Their persons, lands, and goods were the property of the Emperor, who transferred them, at pleasure, to the noblemen of his court. They had so long been accustomed to the distinction between themselves and the nobles, that they never looked to any change in their destinies, or scarce thought of exercising any other will than that of their masters. They were mild, industrious, and intelligent; and, save their political and social condition, shared all the elements that compose useful citizens. The artisans of this caste were skillful beyond those of any other nation of

the world, and, so fond was the Emperor and the nobles of architectural and artificial display, were the most numerous of all. There was, besides, those of whom was composed the vast overflowing population of the city, a still lower and more degraded caste, attached to the soil, whose occupation was that of agriculture. The household servants of the Emperor and nobles were brought from distant provinces, and were of a different race from the Mexicans, being chiefly from the country of the Xamiltepec and Flascalan — the natives of the latter being always selected as attendants on the harems of the nobles. The army of the Emperor was composed of the bondmen appendant of the soil, each noble bringing into the field a certain number; and so numerous were the vassals of this degree, that each knight could, at any moment, place himself at the head of from six to ten thousand of his personal retainers.

Such was the political condition of the empire of the opulent and luxurious Aztecs at this period. Revolts, from time to time, had occurred among the soldiery, and, even in former times, among the artisans in the city; but they were speedily suppressed; and even the neighboring empire of Peru, the policy of which was similar, had been twice revolutionized within a century. Nevertheless, this state of feudal vassalage and sole imperial power, continued still to exist unshaken — the subjects of it submissive and passive, if not content with their chains. But a new spirit was awakened, by a series of wrongs, in the breasts of two or three individuals of the enslaved mass, whose spirits had not bowed so low as their fellows, and Liberty seemed about to descend and once more make her abode among them.

'We are, indeed, slaves,' said one of the group, after Hucha had disappeared. 'The hunchback speaks well. We are no better than the Xamiltepec, or base Flascalan. He speaks truth.'

'It is true,' answered Pireni, the silver-smith. 'I think the Emperor should treat us better.'

'T is not better treatment we desire from the Emperor,' said Uhman, the water-man; 'it is freedom we want. We want to feel that our wives and daughters are our own, and not the licentious nobles' — that our houses, goods, and coin are *ours*.'

'This were a good thing, could it happen so,' said Hunaqua, the barge-keeper; 'but we wont see it in our day, neighbors.'

'No, no; not in our day; we must be content,' was the general response; and then glancing timidly round, to see if they had been noted conversing together, they separated, each man going to his own home. But the startling subject of their conference was not banished from any of their minds. The brand had been thrown, and waited only for the wind to fan it.

The hunchback took his way along the water side, until he came to a narrow, steep street, that led from the canal to a hill-top, crowned by a temple, erected to the god of war. This was the street of The Armorer. It was nearly deserted, for it was already evening; and the young man glided along the dark fronts of the buildings, beneath the overshadowing balconies, for some distance, without meeting any one. His step was firm, his pace swift, and his course decided and unhesitating. At length he stopped, opposite a long building, of more imposing appearance than others in the street, on the front of which was hung out a gigantic shield, showing the craft of the occupant — for the character of every shop in the street was designated by a brazen helmet, a sword or spear head, a cuirass or gauntlet, or some part of knightly garniture, each portion of armor having its own appro-

priate craftsman. The hunchback, after a moment's delay before the building, crossed the street towards it, and struck upon the door.

'Is it thou, Sismarqui?' asked a voice within.

'It is Hucha,' answered the young man, in a low tone.

'Hucha! and, pray, what dost thou here, good youth, after night-coming?' said a large, heavy man, opening the door from within, and taking him by the hand, in a friendly manner.

'Let me enter, Ota, and I will inform thee of my business.'

He passed by him into the shop as he spoke; and the armorer, closing the door, turned towards him.

'Ota,' asked the hunchback, in an assumed, careless tone, glancing about the low shop, which was hung around with shields, 'how many shields hast thou here? thy craft is thriving.'

'Some seven hundred. Yes, Hucha, 't is a busy trade.'

'And thou art getting rich, doubtless?'

'Rich! Doth not the Emperor's armorer pay me eleven brass *xu* a day, and doth he not pay the same to all artisans, of whatever trade, in Mexico, taking their labor. Who getteth rich, that thou talkest thus, boy?' he replied, angrily.

'Were the recompense of thy labor thine, Ota, how many siver *xu* couldst thou, and thy score of apprentices, earn in a day?'

'Silver *xu*? The Emperor's lieutenant, at the armory, receives from each knight five golden *xu* for each shield I emboss with the royal eagle, and a golden *tsi* in addition, if I add to them a sun in low relief.'

'Thou wouldst be a happy man, Ota, would the Emperor give thee thy honestly earned profits.'

'I could buy the third part of this street in one year's labor.'

'I would thou wert rich, for I know thou lovest money.'

'It were a hungry love in Mexico, Hucha. I would to God I had been born a noble.'

'Ah! dost thou love them so well as that?' asked the artful hunchback.

'Nay, I love them not, for I get little good by them — though I live by their armor. I would be a noble only for the wealth and power it would give me.'

'Dost thou, then, believe that their wealth and power is all that elevates them, and the want of which degrades thee?' demanded the young man, eagerly.

'I did not think so when I was a youth like thyself,' replied the stout armorer, in a more cautious tone, as if he thought he was speaking too boldly; 'but I have thought since it might be the case.'

'Thou hast thought justly,' cried the hunchback, with enthusiasm. 'They have no natural rights that are not equally our own — slaves, bondmen, serfs as we are. Ota, the time has come when the million of degraded Mexitilli must think for themselves. Light from the bright Sun, celestial moral light is breaking upon my mind, and I see its beams illuminating yours. I have visited you to feel your pulse. I find, though other causes move it, it beats kindred to mine. I am resolved not to sleep till I have sounded others I have in my mind — thy son, Sismarqui, and my cousin, Montezuma, being first among them. I think I know their tempers, though, hitherto, we have conversed on this deep matter but with our eyes, when we have witnessed wrong we dared not avenge. But the time is coming! Pledge me thy hand and sacred oath, thou wilt be ready to answer a call to free thyself and all thou lovest from bondage.'

'Thou art jesting, Hucha,' said Ota, bewildered.

'It will be no jest, if I can inspire but five hundred of my fellow bondmen with my spirit. I tell thee, armorer, if I can make thirty young men, whom I shall call upon to-night, listen to me, I can move a power that shall make the nobles of the empire shake in their gilded palaces.'

'By the gods! young man, I have half caught thy spirit. Hist! Let us discourse lower. Let me hear thy plan. Thy words have broke the shell of a nut I have been cracking within my teeth for twenty years.'

They walked apart, a few moments, in close conversation, and then the armorer, as if replying to some question he had finally put to him, said—

'Come hither, and I will show thee.'

He led him towards a door, at the extremity of the shop, and they passed through it, and crossed a narrow court, to a door that led into the rear of the adjacent building.

'Now, if thou canst get Insquini, the old sword-maker, to join us, his influence will bring in two thirds of the armorers, with their apprentices, in this street.'

They knocked at the door, which was opened by a small, old man, who, nevertheless, possessed much of the bearing and fire of youth in his appearance.

'Ah! neighbor, is it thou? I was about retiring for the night,' he said, neither repelling nor inviting them to enter.

'I have brought thee Hucha, the hunchback, who would speak a word with thee, touching matters, I think, will find thee a willing ear.'

Insquini, on seeing the hunchback, extended his hand frankly towards him, and said—

'Come in, young friend! 'T is over late—but thy company is always welcome—ever ready at a song thou—ever with a pleasant tale on thy lip. Come in—come in!'

They entered the shop, and Hucha's eyes glistened, as the lamp the sword-maker held gleamed along tiers of swords, arranged symmetrically on the sides of the long, narrow apartment. It was impossible to read, otherwise than truly, the language that gleamed in them, as he surveyed the steady array.

'Insquini, thou makest a goodly show of steel, here,' he said, carelessly. 'Doubtless, thou hast a thousand good blades there?'

'Better than that, master. Eighteen hundred at the most—besides a stack of seven hundred sent here to-day to burnish, not yet unpacked.'

'What dost thou make swords for, Insquini?'

'Make swords for, boy?'

'Aye, what are they for? What is their use?'

'Nay—thou art disposed to be merry with an old man, and quibble his dull brain with a riddle.'

'I was never more serious in my life.'

'I make them for knights and nobles, and I have even burnished a sword for the Emperor's own use, before I got so old.'

'And what do the knights and nobles with these swords when they get them?'

'Use them in battle.'

'How long is it since our knights fought in battle?'

'It is seven—nay, eight years.'

'And thou hast had no work in swords since then, Insquini.'

'Bless you, Hucha! It would seem the swords have been made three to one since then.'

'What is done with them?'

'The nobles or knights, our masters, wear them in bravery by the side, as it were.'

'And they have made no manner of use of them, then, for eight years.'

'Use! Doth not every gallant slay his man a day?' said the sword-maker, laughing. 'There hath been little idle steel, master hunchback! Ha, ha, ha! Our knights keep themselves in practice.'

'How?' demanded the hunchback, coming close to him, and speaking sternly.

'How!' repeated the sword-maker, starting back a step, alarmed at this sudden alteration in his hitherto apparently indifferent tone and manner.

'Yes—*how* do they keep their swords in play—on what objects?'

'Why, surely, master Hucha, upon we citizens about,' replied the artificer, with a forced laugh; 'if we please not their humor.'

'Upon we citizens about, if we please not their humor!' repeated the young man, with biting irony, mingled with grief. 'Yes, thou hast well said, Inisquini! Would to the gods, the next knight that crosses thy threshold would thrust thee through, and impale thee to the side of thy shop, to test the temper of thy swords.'

'Dost thou wish it, cruel youth?' asked the sword-maker, with surprise and injured feeling.

'Dost thou?' demanded Hucha, with imperative emphasis.

'No, surely,' said the man, with a shudder.

'Yet, it may happen to thee, any day. Dost thou never think of it?'

'Often; but I have escaped all my life, till now.'

'Because thy occupation was useful to them, and thou hast been cunning, in thy speech, with a slave's wisdom. But, passing by thyself—thou hast five sons, who work with thee at thy craft.'

'Hath harm come to them?' asked the old man, grasping the wrist of the hunchback, and looking eagerly for his reply.

'No—that I have knowledge of; but thou hast no peace in them. They may be slain before thy face, and thou not be able to save them.'

'I know it—I fear it hourly,' answered Inisquini, with paternal feeling.

'Old man, what wouldst thou do if thou couldst insure thy sons' lives to good old age?'

'Sacrifice myself to the gods,' answered the father, fervently.

'I know thou wouldst. But thou canst effect it easier. Thou art an old man, and have seen and thought much. I need not tell thee that the nobles who enslave us do it not because they are more powerful in number than we, but because we are the most degraded in spirit? Is it not so?'

'Hush! thou wilt be heard,' cried Inisquini, with fear.

'Is it not so?' repeated Hucha, more determinedly.

'I have thought it was; but—'

'It is so. If thou and thy five sons should this moment be sent for by any dissolute noble, to be set up for a pastime, and then slain, you would weep, and wail, and wring your hands, and implore the gods; but yet you would go, like bullocks, dragged to the altar of sacrifice.'

The old man looked timidly round, and shrank within himself with mortal fear, as if he expected to hear at his door the supposed summons. 'Go, Hucha, go; thou wilt assuredly bring death upon me and mine,' he cried, trembling.

'Inisquini,' said the young man, solemnly, 'I know thou hast a resolute spirit by nature, and art considered wise above thy fellow-craftsmen. I will be brief with thee. In a word — within three days the power of the nobles shall be overthrown, the chains that bind us shall be sundered, and every serf in Mexico shall be free as heaven's own light.'

'Madman!' cried the sword-maker, with angry surprise.

'There is method in my madness. Listen: I have been, this night, injured beyond my forbearance, by these nobles. They cast my father into the canal, for sport, and, but for me, he would have perished; and me they mocked with jeers and jests that have stung me to the soul. No, Inisquini! I shall be passive no longer. Thirty thousand nobles shall not keep their feet on the necks of a million men, that can walk with their faces heavenward. I shall neither sleep nor eat till I have awakened in the breast of every man in whom bondage has yet left man's moral courage, the spirit of retributive vengeance against our oppressors.'

The sword-maker gazed upon the glowing and indignant face of Hucha for a few seconds after he had ceased, and then paced the floor with a hasty step. The hunchback pressed the hand of the armorer, Ota, and smiled victoriously as he looked after him, and witnessed the effect of his words.

'The fire takes,' he said; and added, feelingly, 'my degraded fellow-bondmen will yet assert their rights!'

'Hucha, there is my hand!' at length said the sword-maker, in a firm voice; 'it were better to die, as surely we must, if we attempt this thing and fail, than live longer so.'

'We shall *not* die! the gods favor it,' said Hucha, elevating his right hand towards heaven with a look of kindling enthusiasm. 'Let us three embrace and swear by the sun, our sacred father, we will devote ourselves to this cause!'

'We swear!' all three repeated, in one voice together, stretching their hands towards the East.

'Now, noble Inisquini,' said the youth, smiling, and glancing at the serried lines of blades, 'we have twenty-five hundred swords. Is it not so?'

'How?' demanded the sword-maker, with astonishment.

'When I came in we had seven hundred shields. Was it not so, Ota?' said Hucha drily.

The sword-maker turned upon the armorer, and asked, incredulously,

'Hast thou indeed given the emperor's shields to this enterprise?'

'Shall we send them with these swords to him and his knights, to use against us, should this matter come to a head,' replied Ota, ironically.

'Be it so,' said Inisquini, acquiescing in a measure that at first startled him, from its magnitude, 'I did not think this was so well-shaped a plan. I can see deeper into it. Hucha, go, with my blessing! Be shrewd, cautious, and bold.'

'Thou must labor, too. With thy sons and apprentices, and those of Ota, there are already sixty men counted. They must know it only at the last moment, when they are wanted for action. They are sure?'

'Sure to do our bidding,' replied both of the artificers together.

'You now know my plan,' said Hucha. 'I go now to communicate it to others. You must be equally diligent to-night and to-morrow in sounding the armorers through the street. Ten thousand men ought to be communicated with, each one converting his fellow, by to-morrow's sunset.'

'For arms,' said Inisquini, 'a thousand suits of armor, and swords and spears enough for twelve thousand men, can be found at hand in this street.'

'And I will bring twelve thousand men to demand them,' said the nuncback, with energy. 'Now fare thee well. I must see thy son Sismarqui to-night, Ota, and, above all, I must see Montezuma.'

'Sismarqui was sent to the armory, but I think Montezuma's fair sister hath beguiled him of his time on his way back, or he would have been at home ere this.'

The hunchback bit his lips as he alluded to his cousin Fatziza, as though he did not relish the coupling of her name with that of the armorer's son — but he said nothing. Grasping the hand of Inisquini, and again urging upon him to kindle the spirit of insurrection in the breasts of all his trustiest acquaintances, he left him, after the latter had placed in his hand a short, two-edged sword, of the finest temper, and with the embosser returned to his shop by the way he had come.

When Sismarqui returns, say nothing to him of this matter until I meet him,' he said, as Ota opened the street door to let him out. 'I will pass here again before midnight, and give your door a tap to see if he is in, should I not find him at the net-maker's. Be faithful and true, and thou wilt yet have thy most glittering visions of wealth realized.'

With these words, the hunchback bade the armorer good night, and issued forth into the street. He proceeded a short distance along the west side of it, and entered a shop which was not yet closed. The sign above the door was a pike. He remained within, ten or twelve minutes, and re-appeared with an elastic step, and proceeded to an artificer's opposite, and tapped at a low door, above which was the sign of a helmet, and in a moment after disappeared within. Scarcely had he done so before the embosser's door, and that of Inisquini simultaneously opened, and both made their appearance wrapped in their scarfs. They met, and conferred an instant on the walk, and then, separating, pursued different ways, with the air of men bent on some deep and secret purpose. As Inisquini glided past the shop designated by the helmet, the hunchback came out.

'Hucha! is it thou?'

'Ah! 't is Inisquini!' returned the other, after a scrutinizing glance.

'What of Requa?'

'The gods seem to have gone before me and breathed into men the spirit of liberty,' was the animated reply of the young man. 'I have only, it would seem, to lift a standard on yonder summit of the hill of the temple, to gather a host.'

'Be not rash. Let us proceed safely that we may gain securely,' said the sword-maker. 'Leave this street to Ota and myself, and go you and see such as live beyond this quarter, whom you think will join us. Let every thing be secret and sacred till the day and hour be ripe. We are moving abroad with our lives in our open palms.'

'I will then seek Montezuma first,' said Hucha, as he parted from him; 'I rely greatly on his judgment and sagacity, if he will join us.'

'We meet at midnight, at my house,' said Inisquini.

'At midnight, then, we shall know whether we are to live slaves, or die men,' answered Hucha.

Inisquini then parted from him and entered the shop of a halberd-maker, while the hunchback, after going a short distance in the opposite direction, turned a corner, and pursued his way along a thoroughfare that led towards the net-makers' street.

CHAPTER V.

MONTEZUMA.

This quarter of the city in which occurred the tumult and massacre of so many citizens, in consequence of the intrepid and spirited conduct of the young scion Montezuma, in wresting the noble's spear from him, as it was entering his bosom, was situated towards the East gate, nearly a mile from the palace, and two thirds of a mile from the net-makers' street, and on the same side of the canal with the latter. The street in which it occurred was one of four great avenues that extended from East to West, across the city, passing over the marble bridges of the canal. In this quarter, the citizens—if men may be so called that are not freemen—were chiefly lapidaries, and workers in marble, builders, and architects, each craft having its own street for its peculiar pursuits. It was near the entrance of the street of lapidaries, where it terminated in an open square, containing an altar to the god of war, that the fray in which the youth was so conspicuous, occurred. The magnificent procession flowed on, like a river of silken and golden waves, bearing upon its tide banners, spears, helmets, and plumes, and moving to the sound of music of the most brilliant and martial description. When the last of the procession, which consisted of a troop of horsemen, clad in steel from peak to spur, had passed by, the multitude, which had remained motionless and still from the moment the slaughter ceased, gave breath to a low, deep, long pent-up murmur. There was a slight movement, and every eye was instinctively turned towards the young man who had been the cause of the tumult. Montezuma was leaning upon the broken spear-shaft he had wrested from the governor of the guard, gazing sternly upon the dead and dying that lay in their blood at his feet. He at length looked up, as if he felt their eyes upon him, and, glancing round upon them, again bent his gaze upon the slain, and remained silent. Of the thousands in that multitude, there were but few that had seen the young net-maker before his resistance to the noble who commanded the emperor's guard. Five or six alone of those about him were his friends and acquaintances; and so dearly had he attached himself to these, by years of intercourse with them, that no sooner did they see his life threatened, than, though overcome with surprise at his daring to resist, they cast themselves before him, not to strike a blow in his defence—for, until this day, this no bondman had dared do—but to cover him with their bodies. One after another they fell, cut down by the soldiery, when those around, struck by this devotion, animated by the bold spirit of the young man, who seemed by the presence of his commanding countenance, to command their lives, and filled with that new spirit of freedom which seems at times to descend upon a nation in one day, and as if inspired by the souls of the fallen, impulsively cast themselves before the breast which had become the target of so many sanguinary spears, and received in their bodies the deadly wounds so fatally aimed at him.

Some of the surviving friends of the slain at length broke the silence, and began to cry out loudly against him, and accuse him of their death. Others regarded him as if he had been a superior being, and there threatened to be a division among them.

'Men and fellow-bondmen, why stand ye here, gazing upon me, as if I

were not of like flesh and blood?' he cried, looking round upon them with stern pity. 'Wherefore do ye murmur with yourselves? I have resisted a noble, and there lie in our midst eighteen dead men who have paid with their lives for my offence. They are your brethren and mine. I am guilty of their death. Let him who is the most degraded slave among ye, strike through the heart that these brave men died to protect.'

As he spoke, he bowed his manly bosom, and seemed to pause and await the death he demanded.

'Ye are silent! I am not accused. Men and brethren, these dead men fell not by my hand, though by daring to resist a tyrant, I have been instrumental to their death. They fell by the swords of assassins—they are the victims of the emperor's retributive vengeance. His wrath, which, for the kindness of some of ye could not reach me, fell upon these! Was it a just deed to slay these men? I wait for your reply.'

'No—no,' cried several stern voices.

'There spoke the true spirit I would rouse in ye. Hear me! We are within the walls of Mexico nine hundred thousand slaves, with skins as fair and hearts as warm as our masters.'

There was an extraordinary movement in the throng, and a confused, agitated murmur at these words, so new to their ears, and they listened with pale, eager faces, in which was settled a look of intense expectation, as he continued.

'And who are these masters? A sanguinary emperor whom you never behold but with fear of your lives; a body of haughty knights and nobles of the same spirit with himself, whose pastime it is to slay your sons and brothers in the streets, for imaginary offences, and violate the honor of your wives and daughters.'

'True, true,' cried a single voice near him; 'true,' echoed a second; 'it is all true,' was taken up by one and another, till a hundred voices responded, at first, faintly, but as their numbers increased, with almost menacing firmness. Montezuma looked around and smiled, while he lifted his hands to heaven in gratitude.

'The gods be thanked! I perceive there is coming a day of reckoning for our masters! Who are these masters? A body not a fiftieth part so numerous as ourselves, enervated by luxury, and idle and dissolute, because supported by the unrewarded labor of our own hands. What right, brethren, has the emperor to seize upon the fruits of your toil? By what claim does the knight and noble hold the wages earned by the sweat of your brows? If you earn twelve silver *xu* a day, by what authority does the emperor take eleven—aye, and the twelfth, if he choose—and cut off your heads and cast your bodies into the kennel if ye dare to murmur! What joy has the mother in her first born, or the father in the son of his strength, or the bridegroom in his bride, or the brother in his sister's love, if they may be at any moment torn from the embraces of your affections, and become the property of tyrants, murderers, and adulterers?'

There was an evidence of the deepest feeling pervading the multitude, as they listened to language such as none had ever listened to before, and received ideas that few present had dared entertain, even in the secret closets of their own hearts. Some who heard him, and had gathered near him from the first, had partaken of his spirit, and had evidently long thought as he did. There was visible an elated joy in their stern countenances that showed they had at last found a spirit to whose guidance they could safely and freely

surrender themselves, with their crude and half-formed notions of liberty, which, until this occasion, had been cherished secretly and timidly in their bosoms. Montezuma dreamt not such a spirit was alive in Mexico. But when the magnetized steel comes in contact with metals, all that is true steel, though not at first discerned, at once flies to meet it. He soon found about him a score of young and middle-aged men, in whom he saw a spirit kindred with his own. He instantly took advantage of the impression he had made, not only on them, but on the whole multitude.

Fellow-bondmen! It is time we should know our rights as men, and citizens of this empire. We and our fathers have been slaves full long to the emperor and his haughty nobility. Let us break our chains, and elevate our condition to that of freemen. Let us demand of him protection, by just laws, for our lives, our possessions, and our domestic honor. Let us secure to ourselves the right of property in lands, and goods, and tenements, and no longer hold them, with our lives, at his will. Let us retain for our own maintenance, and towards the accumulation of wealth, the proceeds of our toil, which now flows into his coffers. In fine, let us become freemen! If the emperor will consent to this, his throne shall rest secure, and we will defend it with our lives—if he will not, let us hurl him from it, and establish a government that shall secure to us those political and social rights that belong to mankind. Behold,' he cried, pointing to the heap of slain, 'behold the first sacrifice on the altar of our liberties. It was the gods alone who inspired these men to this act of fatal devotion. Let the spot where they lie be sacred. Let their bodies be the altar by which we will kneel and swear to deliver ourselves from bondage, or die as they have died!'

A commotion like that of the wind sweeping across heaving waves rose upon the air. It was not loud, but deep and earnest. Every man in the vast multitude seemed moved with the feelings he had awakened. Every bosom of the thousand bondmen seemed struggling to break from its chains. The eye of the young insurgent kindled as he beheld the effect produced. It was the crisis, and he seized it. Elevating his arms, he called on the gods to bear witness, and stretching his right hand towards the setting sun, he solemnly adjured this sacred deity to behold his act; then, bending over the dead, he laid his left hand upon the pile of slain, and lifting the other towards the heavens, cried, in a voice that rung like a trumpet,

'Behold, ye gods, and thou, most sacred sun! Here, on this consecrated altar, I swear to be the liberator of my country. Swear, ye who will with me be free!'

A thousand arms were lifted toward heaven, and a thousand voices responded,

'We swear!'

Montezuma looked around upon them as they ceased, and, spreading out his hands over them, fervently blessed them, from the enthusiasm of his full and ardent feelings.

'Yes, my friends!' he added, 'this spirit is from the gods, and not of ourselves. Let us feel that we are acting under their guidance, and are protected by their power. Now, I pray you, retire to your abodes in quiet, until the hour is ripe. It may be at midnight—it may be at sunrise. The signal shall be a flame on the summit of the temple of the god of war, which we shall first seize and defend. In the mean while be ready to act, and busily spread the spirit of revolt throughout your quarter. I hasten to my own quarter, in the centre of the city, which I shall rouse, if the gods go with

me. Let not the rumor reach the palace; and, lest any traitor should seek to betray our open plot ere it be matured, at once guard the avenues from your quarter, and let no man leave it. Ha! yonder moves hastily away a Flascalan eunuch of the palace, and there sits upon horseback, on the outskirts, a cavalier. Seize them both! Let this deed show your sincerity.'

The Flascalan fled, and succeeded in making his escape, but the other was instantly surrounded, and would have been bodily torn from his horse to the earth, when the knight, who had coolly permitted them to approach within a few feet of him, unmoved, suddenly cried,

'I will betray you not, brave citizens! Conduct me to your leader, for I would speak with him.'

'Give up thy sword, then, master,' said one of the most resolute and zealous of the insurgents,

'Take it,' he replied, giving it readily to him.

As the crowd retired to either side, to let the knight pass through, the young chief eyed him, first with suspicion, and then with the closest curiosity. He was a man of large stature, and courteous bearing, and rode one of those powerful, black horses, of the warlike breed, imported from Peru. His armor was plain, but not in fashion, like that worn by the Aztec nobles, and there was no device upon his shield, and on his brazen helmet was the crest of a lion, instead of the Aztec eagle. His visor was closed; but the short, light, brown hair escaped beneath his casque, and rested on his shapely shoulders. As he approached Montezuma, who stood in the space where lay the dead bodies, his horse reared so powerfully as to threaten to fall backwards upon his rider, who kept his seat as unmoved as if the motions of the animal were the result of his own will. The silence and expectation of the crowd was immense as he came near.

'Young man,' he said, in a tone slightly of reproof, 'thou art hasty in setting upon a knight with such deadly purpose as these friends of thine but now manifested towards me.'

'Thou wert a listener, noble, to treason. Thou shouldst have held on thy way, and thou wouldst not have been a prisoner, as now. But methinks thou art not of Mexico, by thy speech and device.'

'I am a Peruvian, having but this hour entered your city, and having been witness of thy spirit as I delayed to gaze on the religious procession and the beauty of the emperor's fair daughter, I was unawares a witness of what has followed, and did listen to your speech, brave youth, with a delighted bosom. I am a Peruvian, and can sympathize with thee.'

'If thou art a Peruvian, then thou art welcome; for I am told there are no bondmen in Peru, but that the Inca is father to a nation of children. Is it so, knight?'

'Thou hast been well informed,' replied the knight. 'Peace, love, and contentment dwell with us, and justice and mercy are as the right and left hands of the Inca, our father.'

'Peru is the land of freedom, friends,' cried Montezuma. 'Let us confer upon Mexico the same blessings. Pray, sir knight, whither do you ride? through the city? Thou art free to go.'

'Nay, I am but a stranger, and know no hostel better than another. If either among you could give me hospitality till the morning, I should prefer it, as my business hither requires that I should be awhile private.'

'Thou shalt go with me, noble sir,' said Montezuma, 'though thou wilt find but poor fare and rude entertainment beneath a net-maker's roof.'

'It is good enough, young man. I will be thy guest; and it may be I can advise thee somewhat as to guiding the direction of this vast flood thou hast so boldly unbanked; and if thou wilt, when I shall get through my affairs, accept my arm and good sword; they shall be freely given to thy cause.'

In a few moments afterwards, the multitude retired from the square to their several homes, to arm and prepare for the contemplated revolt. The success of Montezuma in rousing them to action, showed that the love of liberty is inherent in the human heart, and that, however it may be obscured, it is never wholly extinguished. Not five men in degraded and enslaved Mexico until this day had ever spoken the word, and few knew that there was such a thing as liberty. But the manner in which they received it when it was pronounced, told plainly that the chord was in their bosoms, and had hitherto been silent for want of a bold hand to strike it.

Still did Montezuma dream, that the spirit that was kindled in his bosom was at the same moment firing the breast of the bold young armorer, Sis-marqui, rung a mile distant in the net-maker's street, and would shortly, uninfluenced by either voluntarily, animate the soul of the insulted hunchback. But Liberty, when she would be worshipped on earth, erects her statue in such temples as she will; and this evening the sacred flame of freedom, simultaneously lighted by her own hand, blazed from the chosen altars of three of the noblest hearts in Mexico.

'Sir knight,' said Montezuma, when the citizens had retired from the place, which they did in deep and solemn silence, as if their newly awakened feelings were too serious for words, 'dost thou note that deep undercurrent? how mighty its flow — yet how noiseless! It is this that is going to undermine the palaces of our masters, and sweep away the ruins, till there shall not be left a column on its pedestal.'

'Thou hast set in motion a fearful power, young man,' said the knight, gravely, 'which, uncontrolled, will overthrow not only this fair empire, but recoil upon itself to its own overwhelming ruin. Pray, as we go along, give me the history of this matter of public grievance.'

Montezuma pointed to the heap of slain.

'There is written to-day's page of wrongs. Each day hath its leaf.'

'Nay — I know all this. The laws and government and manners of thy empire we in Peru are not strangers to. I see that you have, at last, revolted, and are meditating the subversion of the throne. But what is the mode of government, with which thou wouldst replace the present? Wouldst thou slay the emperor and the nobles, and let each man be his own governor?'

'No, knight; this were exchanging tyranny for anarchy. I would not destroy the throne, but purify it. The emperor should be the ruler of his people — not their master.'

'You would destroy, then, the barriers that stand between you and the nobility, leave their rank open to the deserving among yourselves, and from vassals and appendages to the power of the nobles, become free and independent citizens, with none but political subjection to the emperor.'

'It is this we aim at,' said Montezuma, with animation, 'alone.'

'You, yourself, may aim at what you will, young man, if, as it seems, the gods have decreed you to be leader in this revolt. Take care your virtue be not wrecked, when ambition take the helm!'

'Nay, by the sacred sun, knight!' said the youth, warmly. 'Let my hopes of my country's freedom be realized to the extent you name, and I will be content after to be offered the first sacrifice to the gods.'

'Such is thy present spirit, because thou art not yet tempted. Methinks,' he then said, carelessly, 'it was the beauty of the princess Eylla, whom I beheld in the chariot, that led thee to thrust thyself in the way of the rude knight's spear, and that now threatens to overturn Mexico.'

'How knowest thou it was the Princess Eylla, Peruvian, if thou hast but now entered the city a stranger?' asked the young Mexitlian, sternly, looking suspiciously upon him, as if he sought to penetrate the bars of his closed visor. 'I have been full free in my confidence?'

'Thou holdest my sword in thy hand, and a thousand men would be obedient to thy sign,' answered the knight, calmly. 'I inquired of a bystander, and he told me. I knew the emperor by his crown, and having seen his face stamped upon thy coin.'

'Pardon me, knight. But this is a time when confidence should be given cautiously, especially to one of thy rank. If thou art, as thou sayest, a Peruvian, come hither on matters of private import, I seek not to penetrate thy secret, and do again restore thee my confidence. If thou wilt follow me, I will guide thee to my abode. I have much to do ere midnight.'

The knight dismounted, as if in courtesy to his companion, and, putting his bridle on his arm, walked beside him. As they passed along through the narrow and winding streets, the sight of a bondman and a knight walking by together, drew many to the doors of their shops, and upon their balconies.

'I did awhile since allude to the beauty of the emperor's daughter, young man,' said the knight, as they went along, as if disposed to converse. 'What is her favor with the court?'

'She is lively, in mind as in person, and of a sweet and gentle temper — in all things opposite to the emperor,' answered Montezuma, warmly.

'Hath she been sought in marriage, knowest thou?'

'It is rumored the haughty Prince Palipan will espouse her.'

'Ah! hath she regard for him?'

'Rumor saith not; but 'tis the emperor's will, and there is none other in the empire she can wed.'

The knight walked on in silence a little while, and then suddenly asked,

'When do these espousals take place?'

'Within seven days — on the anniversary of her twentieth birth-day.'

'She is very fair, surpassing my conception of her,' said the knight, after a pause, as if discoursing with his own mind. He then said, turning to Montezuma,

'Will not this revolt of the city thou hast on foot grieve this sweet princess?'

'Nay, I had not thought of it. One would willingly remain a slave, to shield her from sorrow.'

'Spoken gallantly. I am rejoiced to hear she hath such favor with those of thy rank.'

'Thou takest singular interest in her for a Peruvian noble,' said Montezuma.

'The fame of her beauty hath reached our capital, and the Inca's son hath been enamored of her in imagination. Her name is the theme of song among knights and nobles.'

'It were better she were thy prince's bride than that of Prince Palipan,' said the youth, with animation; 'yet, methinks, when I remember her gentle beauty, I should rather she would not marry at all.'

The knight turned his face towards him, as if struck by the manner rather than by the words of the young man, and then said, with a light laugh,

'Have a care, young chief. There is no bound to the horizon of a youth's ambition, when he hath once begun to climb.'

As the knight said this, they came near the ruins of what was once a stately palace. It was now blackened with fire, and its court filled with rank grass. It presented a scene of singular wildness and desolation in the midst of a city so full of life.

The Peruvian paused, and detained his companion by the arm, while he earnestly surveyed it.

'It is the Axuzco palace,' said Montezuma.

The knight made no reply for some time. At length he said, in a voice that had all at once become deep and stern,

'Young man, knowest thou the history of this ill-fated family?'

'T is said — 't was when I was a boy it happened — that the Lord Axuzco was a traitor, and so the emperor banished him, and razed his palace.'

'He was a traitor, young man, just as thou art now a traitor! He was a patriotic and a brave man, and dared to tell the tyrant Ulyd his mind. At length, sickened with the tyranny of the emperor and the licentiousness of the nobles, with indignation and disgust he withdrew himself from them, joined himself with the oppressed people, and raised the standard of revolt, and shouted liberty to the enslaved. This palace was the seat of the conspiracy. But the mass of the debased people knew not the cry, and did not obey it. He was taken, with a few score of the boldest spirits, that had united themselves to him, and cast into prison. His companions were decapitated and quartered. He himself wrested the headman's axe from his hands on the very scaffold, and, cutting his way through the soldiers with the glittering instrument, unhorsed a knight, leaped into his saddle, and escaped through the gates.'

'I never heard of all this before,' said Montezuma, who had listened with surprise to the knight's narrative.

'Because those with whom thou hast been dare not speak of it. The name of Axuzco is accursed in Mexico by imperial decree.'

'Would to the gods we had this good knight's arm, now that people have responded to the cry of liberty.'

'Young man,' said the knight, in an impressive voice, 'thou hast thy wish. Behold in me the banished lord of Axuzco!'

'Thou!' cried Montezuma, starting back at a name that he had but seldom heard repeated, and with which he had hitherto associated the darkest and most fearful qualities.

'Yes, I have come back, after eighteen years' exile, to see once more my native land and the halls of my youth. The gods have brought me to my journey's end this day, as if, by design. Thou knowest not how my blood leaped when I saw thee, ere I had got a furlong into the city, resist the emperor's guard. I thanked heaven that I had found one man in Mexico on my return. I could have embraced thee to my heart.'

'Noble lord of Axuzco —'

'Nay, I am but a simple Peruvian cavalier — my secret is with thee till I see fit to reveal it — I but gave it into thy keeping as pledge of confidence. Now I do think of it, I will e'en seek the naked hospitality of my own abode. My steed will fare richly off the wild grass of the court, and I need nothing. When thou needest my aid, thou wilt find me in yonder wing. There was my chamber, and I would make friendship with its walls again.'

‘Footstep hath not ventured there since thou left it, sir.’

‘Then ’tis the more sacred to my feelings. When thou dost think thyself sufficiently safe to light thy beacon upon the Temple of War, come hither with those friends thou takest into thy closest councils, and let once more the standard of liberty be raised within these walls which the emperor’s curse hath consecrated to be its most sacred temple.’

As he spoke he grasped the young man’s hand and led his horse beneath the dilapidated archway of the ruin, and crossed the gloomy court in the direction of the main body of the building, which, though partially destroyed, still preserved the outline of its former stately character, and some remains of its architectural beauty.

Montezuma, after lingering a moment till he saw him pass through the ivy-mantled entrance to the hall, pursued his way, wondering at the events that the last hour had produced. The day was nearly at a close when he resumed his way, and he had gone but a few steps when the crimson light of the altar fires illumined the sky and told him that the sun had set. He stopped, and turning his face towards the west, crossed his hands upon his breast, and for an instant worshipped, and then continued rapidly to walk forward. At length he entered a narrow lane, lined on both sides with dark gloomy buildings, and at the extremity was an arch and battlement crowned by massive towers. The street led beneath this arch and lost itself in a broader thoroughfare beyond which itself led to the canal touching it not far above the net-makers’ street.

He continued to walk rapidly forward through the lane, until he approached the arch, where was stationed a guard to protect the armory, which was a vast structure with long tiers of stone galleries in the midst of a vast paved court, on the left of the archway. He still held the broken pike in his hand, though scarcely conscious of possessing it.

Ha! Montezuma! what dost thou with the head of a knight’s spear?’ said the soldier, a tall and almost gigantic man, in the tone of an acquaintance. ‘There is blood upon it, too!’

‘Hist, Gila!’ said Montezuma, as he came near him. ‘When wilt thou be off guard?’

‘Within an hour, or little more.’

‘Then come thou, on the instant thou art free, privately to my house. I would speak with thee.’

‘And what with the cruel Fatziza?’

‘Tis sterner pastime I would invite thee to! When my sister gave the preference to thy brother Sismarqui, thou didst say thou wouldst abide by her decision and forget her. I trust thou hast.’

I find a steel corslet won’t keep love out of the heart after he once hath found the way in. I would go back to embossing shields instead of bearing them—but the captain here took such a fancy to my make and inches, he will not let me go—but talked to day of sending me to the emperor’s life-guard.’

‘Come then to me the moment thou art at liberty,’ said Montezuma, passing him.

‘But that bloody spear-head!’

‘I will tell thee, by and by. We are on the eve of revolt. Has Sismarqui been here to day for shields?’

‘I expect him now, to bring half a score, that were ordered to be sent home at this hour.’

If I meet him not, and he should come, tell him without delay to hasten to me.'

With these words, Montezuma passed the tall man-at-arms, who it seemed, had been taken into the guard from the clan of artisans, on account of his strength and stature, and which he had joined as a cure for unrequited love.

Montezuma, on emerging from the arched passage, was proceeding at a swift pace, when he met the apprentices of the embosser, bearing the shields towards the armory.

'Where is Sismarqui?' he asked, stopping the first one, and addressing him so sternly, from the depth of his feelings, that it was with difficulty he could reply, and when he did, it was with what had been uppermost in their minds since they had left the net-makers' street, ten minutes before.

'He hath unhorsed a knight!'

'What sayest thou?'

'He hath had a fray with a knight!' said the other, with more self-possession.

'Dost thou know what thou sayest?' he demanded, in the intensest surprise.

'A mounted knight, in passing the balcony, did give thy sister a kiss, and young master Sismarqui, thereat, caught two of the shields and struck them together so loudly that his horse leaped and threw him.'

'And what did the knight? what further did Sismarqui?' demanded the young man, with breathless interest.

'The knight drew his sword, and rushed upon him —'

'Yes — yes —'

'And Sismarqui caught the blade on this shield — here is the dent — and shivered it to the hilt.'

'And what then? Glorious Sismarqui!'

'The knight, after some fierce discourse, rode away.'

'And this you tell me is true?'

'Every word of it; here is the shield.'

'Let me see it. Ah! 'twas well done! Liberty hath carved here her own scutcheon,' he said, pressing his lips upon it. 'I will take this sacred shield! Pass on!'

'Tis for the armory.'

'It matters not whether it be taken now, or five hours hence. Leave it with me.'

They continued on their way, after looking upon each other, as if wondering at the meaning of his words, and he remained for a minute, gazing upon the shield.

'I should regard the tale as a dream, but that I do behold here, with my eyes, this deep indent upon the breast of the imperial eagle. This was no chance stroke that lighted so truly upon this emblem of tyranny. Thus shall the eagle himself be stricken! Sismarqui, thou art my soul's own mate!'

'What dost thou, Montezuma, speaking to that shield?' said a voice close to his ear.

Sismarqui, my brave Sismarqui!' was the only reply of the noble youth, and he ardently embraced him.

'Art thou mad?' asked the young man, with surprise.

'Mad! yes, with joy! Look! dost thou know *this* device?'

'Twas carved there by a knight, not half an hour since.'

'And thou didst have words, then, with this knight?' questioned Montezuma, hurriedly.

He did from his horse lean forward to kiss Fatziza, as she sat in the balcony, and I unhorsed him by —

'I know it — And he aimed to avenge himself, and thou didst defend thy life like a man! Let me again embrace thee. We are more than brothers! What merit have we, that the gods have so blessed us this day. I too have resisted a knight — the Governor of the emperor's guard, who would have slain me for being near his way — but — nay, this tells the rest!' he said, exhibiting the broken spear.

'Tis a noble's lance!'

'This I wrested from him and broke.'

'There is blood on it!'

'Yes, for I slew with it, three men-at-arms — and they slew eighteen artisans, who sought to save my life.'

'Montezuma!' exclaimed the young man, with the deepest surprise.

'I was done within the hour, in the street of columns.'

'If this hath been done, then 'tis from this moment, the people or nobles.'

'Thou hast it, brother! I did not think I should be half way met in this thing. I have further to tell thee. Full seven thousand men saw this contest; and when the procession passed on, I inflamed their breasts with a bold, dark picture of their bondage, and at this moment, there are seven thousand hearts in that quarter, that have your spirit and mine! I have just seen a forest of hands lifted to the sun, and heard, like the sullen surges of the heaving sea, thousands of voices as that of one man, swearing to be free.'

'Hast thou, oh, hast thou?' scarcely could articulate the young armorer.

'Aye, and of the gods, too!'

'Then hath the empire of the tyrant passed into other hands from this hour,' said Sismarqui, fervently. 'Whither goest thou? What is thy purpose?'

'I was hastening to find thee, to tell thee that thou wert a slave, and that it was time thou didst get thyself free. But thanks to this knight, he hath taught thee the lesson more briefly than I could have done it. I wish each bond-slave in Mexico could be thus taught it — it would leave me little to do but point to the castle, to the gates, and then to the palace. My purpose is, now that thou hast thy lesson — to give thee one hour to bring over with thy brother Gila, every soldier of the guard in the armory. There is not one but hates the emperor and would side with us, were the standard of revolt once raised. For how many men is there armor there?'

'Suits for eight thousand nobles, and forty thousand soldiers.'

'I will do! The signal will be a flame on the summit of the temple of the god of war, which I shall first seize, and the light will be the sign of success. After you have been to the armory, which you must possess yourself of when you see the light, illumining the city, return and rouse this quarter, by calling on all our friends and neighbors, and tell them to arm, for that this night Mexico is to be made free. The conduct of the revolt in this ward, you will take yourself.'

'What hour will the signal be given?'

'If possible, at midnight. I have a few friends to call on, and arouse. In one hour I shall have visited every dwelling in my own street. Meet me then at my house, where I shall call together those whom I find best fitted to take the lead in this rebellion. Casipeti, and thy father, and Inisquini, Em-

ba, and Malif, the silver-smith, are men I would trust. Besides, I have an ally whom you little dream of. But be at the rendezvous at my house; at the end of the hour, and you shall then hear. We will there decide on our future course. Let us now part.'

'May the gods, in whose hands is the disposition of human events, prosper our cause!'

'Tell Fatziza, if thou seest her, I cannot be back as I promised, said Sismarqui.

'Dost thou think of her?'

'I love her.'

'I love my country.'

'Nor do I love it less for loving one of its maidens.'

With a hearty embrace the two young men then separated. Sismarqui to go to the armory, in and out of which he had free access, from his occupation, and Montezuma, the young and daring leader of this fearful revolt, to sound the name of liberty in the ears of those living in the net-makers' street and along the bank of the canal, ere he should return to his own abode.

CHAPTER VI.

HUCHA AND FATZIZA.

FATZIZA waited by her chamber window, which commanded a view of the street without exposing her to observation, a weary half hour, for the return of her lover, whose protracted absence she finally began to attribute to the consequences of his fray with the knight. At length she heard a footstep in her brother's chamber, and supposing him to have returned, she gladly hastened with a light to open his door and speak to him. On entering she beheld not Montezuma, but Hucha, the hunchback.

'Cousin Hucha, is it thou?' she said, half retiring. 'I thought Montezuma had returned and got in by the balcony, as he sometimes does.'

I came up the same way, wishing to speak to him without disturbing you, dear cousin,' said Hucha with tenderness.

'He hath been abroad since noon, and I fear something evil hath detained him.'

'Is—is Sismarqui here?' asked the hunchback, in a hesitating manner, and a cold tone of voice, singularly contrasting with his recent gentleness of address.

'Sismarqui hath gone to the armory with shields. I did expect him here ere this, on his return. If thou wilt wait, both he and brother will be in soon.'

'Wherefore should I wait, cousin—thou dost not like to have me near thee,' said Hucha, with that sensitiveness characteristic of men who possess any physical deformity.

'Nay—Hucha—do not pain me with this idle language. I did think you had forgotten those feelings. You know I esteem you.'

'Yes—you esteem—because, when you hear me converse, you forget that I am accursed in shape—I would the gods had made me a fool, so they

had made me an upright man. Then I might have shared thy love. For if thou dost deny it to my intellect because of my body, thou wouldst then have given it to my body not missing the mind. Women ever love physical beauty. Thy sex are rarely won by merely mental qualities.'

'Hucha, believe me, you do *me* wrong, at least,' said the maiden, warmly speaking in that softly thrilling tone which in woman conveys so much sympathy; 'was Gila deformed? Is every youth a maiden rejects, rejected for some misshape of limb or feature? or is every one she accepts, alone distinguished for his perfect figure? You are prone to look at all things, dear cousin, through the distorted medium of your own morbid mind.'

'Doubtless, as you say, my mind is distorted, as well as my body,' he said, angrily. 'Would to the gods I had never been born!' And he covered his face with his hands, as if in suffering.

'Nay, Hucha, you are too sensitive! All men love you. Thou hast not an enemy.'

'Yes, they love me because their pity begets a bastard love for the poor hunchback, with his pale face and soft, woman's eyes.'

'I love you, Hucha, and 't is not from pity.'

'Oh, that it were from pity, then! Pity, in thy sex, is but holier love — love without its passion. Woman ever looks upon such as I with love's tenderness: never with love's passion! Thou couldst never *love* me, cousin.'

'Do not let us talk on this theme; 't is an unhappy one! List! 't is Sismarqui! Nay, 't is my father, below.'

'See, now! how the imaginary step of one thou lovest brings the quick color to thy cheek, and modulates thy voice to a rich tremulous key it had not before! I would give my life to be myself the cause of such change in a woman — in *thee*, cousin,' he added, touchingly. 'I am accursed. Cousin Fitziza, believe me, I do so feel my shape, that, though by nature I am of gentle temper and affectionate, I cannot help feeling hatred for all mankind. I do hate, in my heart, thy brother and Sismarqui!'

'T is false, Hucha! altogether false! Thou dost thyself injustice.'

'I tell thee, cousin, I do hate all men who walk upright, with their faces heavenward, as the gods formed them, in stature and countenance like themselves.' 'T is not the hatred that would make me wish their death, but it is of such a kind, had I but my will, I have the heart to torture them, and make them writhe with biting wit, and cutting gibes, and scorching irony. I'd make them feel my power, and, for very fear, do me reverence.'

'This is *not* thy temper, Hucha,' said Fitziza, with indignant energy; 'I know thee better. Thou art all gentleness to all. Friendship hath not a nobler votary than thyself. Thou art doing good ceaselessly, in some way, to the sick, and helpless, and needy, and universal charity hath made thee beloved and almost adored. Why dost thou wrong thyself?'

'I but speak the truth: I said it was my heart that was poisoned by misfortune against my species. My head controls the heart, and philosophy has sternly schooled me to keep it under, if I would live happy. All this charity you speak of is but the scabbard that hides a poisoned sword, lest it chance to prick the wearer's heels.'

'And thou dost hate my brother?'

'Habit hath got me into loving him.'

'And Sismarqui?'

'I do not like him — yet 't is not because nature hath made him a perfect man — but I do not love him.'

'Thou wouldst not surely harm him, Hucha?

'Thy love for him makes sacred his person, in my eyes. Cousin Fatziza! you know not what a noble and loving heart you have flung away,' said the Hunchback, taking her hand and speaking with the most impassioned feeling. 'Thy love, too, would have made me a better man—it would have acted like leaven upon it. But, it matters not,' he added, hastily turning away from her; 'I will try and forget thee, and find oblivion in the stirring scenes about to open.'

'Thou art not angry?'

'Not with thee, but with the gods.'

As he spoke a footstep was heard upon the stairs, and the same instant Montezuma entered the apartment. He appeared fatigued, yet there was a spirit in his countenance, and a kindling of the eye they had never before witnessed.

'Welcome, Montezuma,' said Hucha, in a joyful tone. 'I have been sometime waiting for thee.'

'Thou art pale, brother,' said Fatziza, as she saw him cast himself upon a settle beside the door.

'I have need to be pale, sister. He who carries the ruddy cheek of a careless heart at this time, loves not his country, and has no manhood.'

'Ha! Montezuma, is this thy speech, too?' cried the Hunchback, with surprise.

'We are a nation of slaves, Hucha! but light has broke in upon us—our chains are falling to pieces. The tyrant shall grant us freedom from our servitude, or die. Man's blood shall no longer be accounted as water.'

'Hush, brother! Thou and Sismarqui are mad to day.'

'Montezuma! what hath kindled thy spirit?'

'And by thine eye thy own has been inflamed also! There is universal inspiration.'

'What hath been done?'

'Blood! blood! The same daily spilling of blood! It cried from the ground for vengeance, and I have answered it. It was by the emperor's orders, because I defended my life.'

'Didst thou?' almost shrieked the Hunchback, with the excited joy of his feelings.

'T was in the procession to the gate. Had it not been that the tyrant is the father of the sweet princess Eylla, I would have slain the slayer with my own hand.'

'Hist, brother!' entreated Fatziza. 'Speak not so loud! Ere this thy words have been caught up, and swift wings are bearing them to the emperor's ears. Alas, what aileth thee and all I love this day—that they should court their own destruction!'

'I have whispered rebellion,' continued the young man, heedless of his sister's words, 'in the willing ears of ten thousand of my fellow-slaves.'

'And at this moment it is being breathed into the ears of hundreds in this quarter,' said Hucha, with animation; 'I have been injured this day by our masters, but knew not that thou wert also at work. Where is Sismarqui?'

'Liberty hath anointed him when she did thee and me! Dost thou know I have resolved to raise the standard of revolt ere the sun rise!'

'Be thou the leader in this thing, cousin! I did think I had been its mover—but I see I am but an infant to thee.'

'I have already chosen seven leaders of divisions. They will be here soon. Our final rendezvous is to be at midnight, at the Axuzco palace. We shall then mature our plans, and act.'

'The Axuzco palace?'

'Why dost thou start. Come thou, then, with such chosen men as thou canst trust in council, and thou wilt see a man there whose name will make thy bosom throb high.'

While he was speaking, a tap was heard on the street door, below.

'There must be Casipeti!' said Montezuma.

'Casipeti! He yesterday struck a noble.'

'And, believe me, you, and I, and Sismarqui have been inspired by this bold deed, without knowing it. My blood leaped when 'twas told me, yesterday.'

'And mine.'

'Let us give the bold Casipeti the credit, then, of striking out the first rivet of our chains. Come with me below. I would meet him there.'

He went down as he spoke, followed by Hucha, leaving the distressed Fatziza a prey to the most dreadful anticipations. Yet she was grateful to hear, from her brother's words, that she had not been altogether the instrument, as the object of the knight's passing gallantry, of awakening this spirit in the minds of the people.

'Welcome, Casipeti,' said Montezuma, admitting the visitor into a low apartment hung round with the materials of a net-maker's craft. 'Thou art punctual! How goes it with thy news?'

'I have eight hundred men, that, at the sound of my name, in the silver-smiths' street, are ready to follow where I lead!'

'I will go and see Ota, Inisquini, and others, and bring them hither,' said Hucha, hastily departing.

He had scarcely left before, one after another, several persons, with arms beneath their scarfs, came in, until fifteen men were assembled in the little room. Not long afterwards Ota, the armorer, and Inisquini, the sword-maker, joined them. Montezuma then drew from each the various successes they had met with in rousing their fellow-citizens, and, finding the result beyond his most sanguine hopes, detailed to them briefly his plans, and invited them to meet him at twelve o'clock, at the ruined palace of Axuzco, where he would make known to them one whom they would find was no mean auxiliary to their cause. He met with some opposition from Inisquini and one or two others, whose wish was to attack the palace, slay the emperor, and take the government into their own hands. But Montezuma, seconded by Casipeti, Hucha, and the rest, resolved, first, only to seize upon the gates, bridges, and military defences, and then propose terms to the emperor and nobility. If they were complied with he was to be permitted, with certain restrictions, to retain the throne—if denied, the imperial palace and the palaces of the nobles were to be attacked, and their subsequent course to be governed by the events.

'Sismarqui,' at length, said Montezuma, when he had brought Inisquini over to his views, 'will, doubtless, soon be here. If he has succeeded in bringing over the guard, there remains no doubt of our success. One cohort of troops on our side will be the rallying point for the whole army, who are as degraded as ourselves.'

While he was speaking, Sismarqui entered, clad in armor from head to heel. All started till he spoke.

'The armory is ours,' he cried, in his excitement, seeing none but Montezuma, who let him in. 'Every soldier's breast beats with joy. We have only to send the people there for arms when the time comes to strike the blow. Ha! Casipeti here! My father, too! Inisquini! Hucha! Emba, Xaxeti!

'We are all present, and welcome you, brave Sismarqui, to our councils,' said Casipeti.

'There is no time to lose!' said the young armorer. You who are to take the head and lead of the revolt, and would provide yourselves with weapons, go now to the armory. The rumor will, ere this, have reached the nobles. Wherever I go I see the streets alive with people, dispersed in groups, some armed, and others impatient to get their arms, and for the hour of midnight. At the first blaze of the signal-light, the streets will pour forth its thousands. Never was such a universal spirit spread among a multitude in so brief a space.'

'The rumor may reach the palace,' said Casipeti, with calm dignity; 'but the emperor will scarce dream that 't is more than a street affray, and despatch a troop of horse to quell it. But, as 't is yet confined to this side the canal, 't will scarce have got there. But we have no fear of any united force until the greatness of the revolt is known, and that can only be when the whole people will be up in their might, with arms in their hands. 'T is but four hours to midnight; and each moment but strengthens and ripens the cause. Let us go and arm ourselves, my friends. We meet again at the Axuzco palace.'

With these words the chief conspirators separated, leaving only Sismarqui behind with Montezuma. The former delayed but to interchange a few words with Fatziza, whom, at length, he left in tears.

Montezuma paced the apartment a while in deep thought. He felt he had incurred a deep responsibility, as the leader of the fearful revolt. He had kindled an insurrectionary flame in a hundred thousand breasts, that seas of blood could alone extinguish. He thought of the Princess Eylla — of her beauty and goodness. For her sake, he felt he would be willing to undo all he had done — that she might be happy, continue to be a slave. He shrunk at the evil that menaced her. He half-conceived the thought of rushing forth to turn back the current he had let loose. It was then that he reflected, painfully, yet not with regret, that he had roused a spirit he could not lay, and that, as the helmsman is borne along with the ship he guides and governs, he himself must become subservient to the will of the vast power he directed.

CHAPTER VII

THE PRINCE AND PRINCESS.

EARLY on the same evening on which these events transpired, the lovely Princess Eylla sat in her gorgeous chamber, gazing forth from the palace window upon the serene beauty of the night. The 'bright bands of Orion' were spanning the east, and the 'sweet influences of Pleiads' ruled the hour. The last roseate tinge had long since faded from the edge of the mountains

of Ixtitlan, and on the summit of the peak of Ix, the 'Star of the Burning Stone' gleamed palely, like a planet setting upon it. Beautiful slaves, in the richest dresses, kneeled at a distance, with their folded hands laid across their bosoms, silently watching for the least sign of her will, or gesture of command.

The thoughts of the Princess were not on the scene spread out before and beneath her. Long and meditatively did she remain there, until the moon rose, and poured the golden flood of her orient light into the open lattice by which she sat, and falling upon her fair forehead, gave it the soft lustre of the pearl. One snowy hand, half in the moonlight, half in the shade, sustained her cheek. Ever and anon her young bosom would heave and fall, and from her parted lips a low sigh escape. The light of the moon seemed to rouse her from the deep reverie in which she had been for the last half hour. All at once she started to her feet, and at the same instant, her slaves flew and prostrated themselves around her.

'Tzitzis,' she said to a beautiful Peruvian slave, with flowing black tresses, a slender waist, and limbed like an antelope, 'you remain with me; the rest of you retire to your couches. I shall need your attendance no longer till dawn of day.'

Slowly, with their faces turned towards her, the young girls retired, and the princess was left alone with her favorite and confidential slave.

'Tzitzis!'

'Your highness,' answered the slave, still kneeling at the footstool of her mistress, and without lifting the heaving, slumberous eyelids that veiled her brilliant eyes.

'You have heard that several poor men were slain to day, as we passed through the city, towards the Temple of the East Gate, to sacrifice to the Sun.'

'Nay, your highness, I did not. But as scarce a day goes by without bloodshed, I doubt not this day has had its share,' replied the slave, with a mixture of irony and sorrow in her manner.

'Hist, minion! It is my father's unhappy disposition. Yet he loves me.'

'So does the lion of Peru his whelp—the tiger of Yucatan his young,' answered the Peruvian maid, with a degree of spirit and scorn that her favor with her gentle mistress could only have licensed.

'Have done, Tzitzis,' said the Princess, with some sternness.

The slave bent her head low to the earth, as if humbled by the reproof, her night-hued hair falling like a veil about her face, and her whole subdued attitude that of graceful humility.

'Nay—rise, and listen to me,' said the Princess, after gazing upon her favorite a moment with a smile. The slave threw back from her face her cloud of dark hair, and kissed gratefully the hand extended to her, while the light of a cheerful and merry spirit once more beamed from her intelligent face.

'I have detained thee, pretty one, to serve me with thy ready wits and well-tried faithfulness. Listen.'

The slave gazed an instant into the face of the Princess, as if to seek the key for her guidance and bearing, and discovering that while it was embarrassed it was serious, she bent her head reverently, and with a graceful inclination upon her bosom, and silently awaited the communication of her will.

'There was some commotion today among the populace,' said the Prin-

cess, after a moment's hesitation, caused by an attempt of the officer of the Emperor's guard to seize a youth who, inadvertently and from too eager curiosity to witness the procession to the Temple, thrust himself forward before the others.

'To behold thee, Princess, or I know not the hearts of the youth of the empire.'

'Because thou knowest the heart of *one* youth, dost think thou knowest *all*, chit?' asked the Princess, with a smile of raillery.

The conscious virgin dropped her head still lower upon her bosom, and was silent, while the tell-tale carnation enriched the olive shade of her cheek and brow. The Princess Eylla enjoyed her confusion a moment, and then continued—

'I heard this youth called Montezuma. Know you such a one by name in the city, and his degree?'

'Was he tall and kingly in his port, your highness?'

'He looked majesty himself. Such, methinks, as a prince of the Sun should appear. I have not in all the court seen a noble his equal.'

'Was he youthful withal?'

'Scarce the down had darkened his lip, and the scissors had never touched his flowing locks of jet.'

'Did he smile like the sun in May?'

'Never sun shone brighter than his smile. It sparkled like sunlight upon a fountain.'

'Were his eyes like a diamond set in jet, upon a ground of pearl, flashing fire and speaking intelligence?'

'The same, Tzitzis. Thou hast beheld the youth, maiden!'

'Was he haughty, yet his haughtiness blent with the modesty becoming his degree; and while he looked, *if he looked* on thee, did his eyes, as they gazed, seem to plead thy forgiveness of the deed as they committed it?'

'Thou hast painted him to the very semblance, girl,' said the Princess, laughing, and then blushing as confusedly as the fair Peruvian slave had before done, as she detected a smile lurking in the dimpled mouth of her confidant.

The slave dropped her eyes, as if she would hide their mischievous expression, and the Princess looked forth from the lattice for an instant, and then abruptly rising, took one or two turns through her chamber. After a few moments she stopped, and turned to the kneeling girl, in whose still cast-down yet knowing looks, she too plainly detected the knowledge of what she had not yet dared to confess to herself.

'Tzitzis,' she said, laying her finger lightly across her favorite's forehead, 'be faithful and secret.'

The young slave caught her hand, and fervently impressed a kiss upon it, in token of her devotion to her.

'Seek out this Montezuma,' continued the Princess, 'and bring him secretly to the palace.'

'Your highness!' exclaimed the maiden, with a start of surprise.

'I would see a youth for whom men so freely cast away their lives, as I have this day seen them do,' answered the Princess Eylla, as if she would disguise her real motives from the penetrating intelligence of the Peruvian.

'Your highness, he is a net-maker's son,' said quickly the beautiful slave, who saw with surprise, what she could ill conceal, that a tender emotion had sprung up in the heart of her mistress for the unknown youth—for women can never succeed in disguising their hearts from each other.

'The better still,' answered the Princess, who no longer attempted to veil from her confidant her feelings towards the youth; 'the better still. If he be not princely born, it were best he were at the other end of the degree. Go. I would see him! Use what other instruments thou wilt to aid thee. Let this signet be to him the token of my will. Be speedy, discreet, and as subtle and wise as the Anaconda of thy native Peru.

The slave prostrated herself at the feet of her mistress; then rising reverently, kissed her hand, and glided from the chamber. The Princess Eylla listened to her faintest footstep, and then reseated herself by the lattice, her virgin bosom filled with emotions all new to her, and her thoughts bewildered with a thousand new and strange ideas, yet all tender and pleasing. Before her lay a range of gardens, adorned with fountains, groves, and statues — beyond was the canal, like a broad band of steel, binding the city to the enfolding bosom of the lake Alcolo — while, beyond and around her, rose towers, domes, and columnar altars, mingled together in gorgeous confusion — all lying, like a magic scene of fairy land, beneath the lavish opulence of the moonlight, which flooded all with such mellow radiance, that the whole seemed to be seen by her through a medium of transparent silver.

That the lovely Eylla was suddenly in love with the low stranger who occupied her thoughts, would be doing her injustice to assert. She felt an interest in him, which grew out of curiosity. But interest, once awakened in a maiden's bosom, for a handsome youth, of whatever degree, will ripen into love, if opportunity for cherishing it offers. That this opportunity should not be wanting in her case, she had now taken sufficient care, though her motives, in sending for the young net-maker to appear in her presence, were free from any thing which her maidenly delicacy condemned. And when the idea, that her heart was interested in him, would startle her from her reverie, she would proudly recollect that she was a princess and he a serf, and then, as if fortified against love with delusive security, give her thoughts again to this dangerous theme of their meditation.

While she was thus playing with love's arrows, as if they were innocuous to a princess, a soft strain of instrumental music reached her ear from beneath the lattice. She listened, and heard a manly voice mingle with it; while she could distinctly hear the words of an impassioned song of love addressed to her ear. These were the words:—

THE PRINCE'S SERENADE.*

Wake, Eaglet of Aztec! rise, daughter of Light!
List the lay that I breathe to thee now;
By the Day, that ere long shall arise on the night,
'T is to thee, and thee only, I bow!
'T is the voice of my heart that now falls on thine ear;
Wake, Spirit of Beauty! wake, rise, and appear!

List, daughter of Love, to the breath of my soul!
Like the *Thureb's*,† that sings but to die;
My voice and my spirit together may roll
On the dull, heavy ear of *Itzai*!‡
But thou dost not heed, though that angel alone
Hear the prayer of my soul on his night-shrouded throne.

* The author acknowledges himself indebted for this and the other songs in these volumes, to *Owen G. Warren, Esq.*, of New York.

† A bird of beautiful plumage, fabled to sing only once in its life, and that while dying

‡ The messenger of death.

The star-gem of *Er*! lo, I catch its proud ray,
 Blazing clear on the desolate height!
 But I turn from its beauty and brightness away
 To a ray of more heavenly light!
 Then, Eylla, look down, in the smile of thine eyes
 It is day in my soul, though the sun never rise!

She rose impatiently and bit her lip, as if displeased and agitated. After twice or thrice traversing the apartment, with a quick, excited step, she closed the lattice through which the melodious serenade floated into her chamber; and still hearing the faint swell of the notes, she dropped, with an angry and excited gesture, a heavy curtain of silver tissue across the recess. She had scarcely done so, when she checked herself in the position in which she was, and stood for an instant like a statue.

‘Wonderful — strange! Is this madness? Why has the Prince’s voice all at once become so hateful to me! Is this myself, or is it a spirit not my own that has possessed my bosom? Last night I listened to him — to this very song — with pleasure, though I love him not; and this evening I have no sooner heard his voice, than I fly from the lattice and shut out the sound, as if there were poison in the air on which it rose to my ear. I surely cannot hate Prince Palipan so suddenly! What hath happened to me?’

The Princess Eylla was taking her first lesson in her own heart. She was learning the alphabet of love. The truth seemed to flash upon her. The real cause of her sudden and strange antipathy to the Prince it required no necromancy to explain.

‘Nay — this feeling must not grow,’ she said, with forced resolution. ‘I tremble at the discovery. It must down! Why has that youth’s image such a hold upon my mind! I will force myself to listen to the Prince.’

It was necessary indeed, as she strongly involuntarily expressed it, in her present state of feeling, to *force* herself to listen. She resolutely approached the window, and drew aside the curtain. The music had ceased. She could not conceal from herself that she felt inwardly pleased at this, and laid her hand upon the lattice to open it, when she heard a light step behind her. She turned quickly, and beheld a young man, elegantly attired, who instantly kneeled, as her eyes rested upon him, and laid his hand upon his heart.

‘You are bold, prince!’ she said, quickly.

‘Sweet princess, I do confess it,’ he said, without lifting his glance to hers, and then remained silent.

‘Why are you here?’ she continued, with less displeasure, on witnessing his subdued manner, and then instantly added, with a mantling smile, ‘did you come to witness the effect of your music?’

‘I came, fairest princess,’ he answered, rising, and speaking with a serious air, yet with the graceful courtesy becoming a prince, ‘witnessing the closing of your lattice, to ask thy forgiveness for my offence.’

‘Thou hast not offended me, Palipan.’

‘Wherefore, then, cousin,’ he said, his voice assuming a tenderness that caused her to breathe quicker and bend her eyes upon the tessellated floor, ‘did you show such marks of displeasure?’

‘Prince — do not question me,’ she replied, after a moment’s silence. ‘Thy suit has never been encouraged.’

‘Thou hast endured my presence, princess.’

‘It has been endured, prince,’ she said, pointedly, and the next instant she regretted that she had so sharply marked her reply.

'Has it indeed been thus, Princess Eylla?' he said, haughtily. 'Then hast thou been trifling with thy own heart and mine. I could not believe such duplicity lived in thy pure bosom.'

'Nay, prince,' she said with feeling, 'I have never deceived you. You have daily complained of my coldness, and accused me of not returning your affection. I never loved you, prince. It was my father's wish that we should be united — policy seemed to dictate it — and I have therefore suffered you to hope. But, as you accuse me of duplicity, I will now act openly. We might have been united — I *might* have loved you as a wife, but — but —'

'But what?' demanded the prince, between grief and resentment.

'I cannot love you.'

'It is not *thus*,' cried the prince, 'your sentence would have ended, princess — *but* you love *another*!'

'Prince Palipan! you forget yourself! said Eylla, haughtily.

'Noble princess,' he said, advancing towards her, and wholly changing his manner to one of deep earnestness, 'I beseech you trifle not with me. My heart is devoted to you, and, unawares to yourself, you are inflicting upon me the keenest misery.'

'Prince, I should grieve indeed,' she said, with calm irony, 'if I believed your sorrow was for any thing besides disappointed ambition.'

'Ha! dost thou believe I aim at my uncle's throne, through thy hand?'

'I believe, cousin, it is the loss of the *hand*, rather than the heart, you grieve for.'

'Who hath whispered this?'

'Thyself!'

'Then have I been most false to myself, princess. You do accuse me wrongfully.'

'The archer's arrow may be leveled at the sparrow, but if his glance is at the same time fixed on the eagle that sails above him, it is easy to tell in what direction his shaft will fly.'

The prince looked confused and knit his brow.

'By the golden temple of the sun! cousin, you have misjudged me,' he said, earnestly. 'If this suspicion has had weight in influencing your extraordinary conduct to-night, I swear to you by the sacred eagle of our house, I looked not to the imperial throne, though, 't is true, thy father does! I thought of no diadem but thy peerless beauty — of no throne but thy heart — of no sceptre but thy love!'

'Thou hast spoken it most courtly, cousin, but my heart is unmoved. You see I am plain with you.'

The prince paced the apartment with a quick step and an angry brow. She regarded him with a calm gaze, as if she clearly justified herself for her conduct, from an intimate knowledge of his character. The prince was not above twenty-four years of age, with an extremely elegant and symmetrical person, but a little above the middle height. He was a remarkably handsome man, with brilliant eyes, the glances of which were most penetrating. His features were finely chiseled, and of an elevated character, with a pale, thoughtful forehead. His mouth was wonderfully expressive of his feelings. It was well-shaped, and shaded by a mustache, but the sweetest smile that sometimes played on it, could not altogether destroy a lingering expression of haughtiness and cruelty, that seemed natural to it. He looked like an imperious and passionate man, who, however, had his true

character so much under the control of that he would appear, that its darker and less amiable shades were visible only to such as knew him long and intimately; and these, even, were likely, sometimes, to be deceived. The Princess Eylla, however, had much natural penetration, which, united to years of childish intercourse, gave her means of judging of him with more truth and clearness than was agreeable to him.

Until this evening, she had regarded him as her future husband. Her father had commanded her to give him her hand, and she knew of no alternative but to yield obedience. Recently, in contemplation of a speedy union, their intercourse had been more tender, at least, in its outward character, on his side, for she was, at all times, rather enduring and passive. It was her fate, and, besides her cousin, there was none in the empire with whom her imperial rank would permit her to wed. But, within the last seven hours, a change had been wrought in her, as complete as it was instant. An unknown youth, of humble degree, for his lofty spirit and manly beauty, had awakened an interest in her bosom, that left no room there even for a prince of the empire, who had not the spell to touch the slumbering lute of love, that lies in woman's heart, silent, unresponsive, till some skilled minstrel strikes the thrilling key that awakes its melody. The chord was struck, and harmony flowed that dissolved her own heart; yet she knew not why or how it was done. Love had done its perfect work, and she knew not that it was love. Love had shown her the hitherto unknown treasures of her heart, and she felt she could never waste these riches of love upon the prince. Love showed her the depth of her own feelings—the wealth of affection that was in her heart; he had unlocked sealed fountains of womanly tenderness that she knew not were hidden in woman's heart. She trembled when she reflected that she was about to fling away all these—all this unworked mine of virgin gold. She shuddered, and thanked the gods for the escape.

'Oh!' she said mentally, as the prince paced the room before her, 'Oh, I knew not what I was about to throw away upon him!'

'Fair cousin,' said the prince, suddenly stopping, and taking her hand, 'hath any idle tale of the palace gossip come to thy ears, that thou dost receive me with such a strange mood?'

'I have heard tales enough, cousin,' she said, in an indifferent tone, 'but these have little weight with me.'

'Thou hast heard nothing to-night?' he asked quickly.

The princess smiled at his eagerness and said,

'Hath any thing recent occurred to give food for gossip, prince?'

'Nay,' he said, coloring, 'I did think some foolish rumor or report, from those who would weaken my suit with thee, might have been thrown to the palace, and so get to thy hearing.'

'I hear enough of wrong and outrage, done by the nobles of my father's court upon the inoffensive people, prince,' she said, with spirit; but in this thou canst have had no hand! A prince will ever be above wrong and injustice to the helpless.'

'Thou should'st teach this morality to thy imperial father, cousin,' answered Prince Palipan, with a scornful movement of the upper lip.

'Alas! thou needest not smile, prince; my father needs a better spirit, and I pray the gods he may get one.'

'It will be when the gods take him, then,' said the prince with the same expression.

'Thou art thinking to anger me, cousin, by this mocking of my father. Thou

dost forget he is emperor. I do see in thee exhibited a spirit, that, if thou hadst come to the throne — as, thank the gods, thou wilt never do! — would scarce have made justice or mercy more regarded than it is now.'

'So thou dost thank the gods!' he repeated, with an almost menacing gesture. 'Princess Eylla,' he instantly added, lowering his tone to one of deep feeling, and speaking deprecatingly — so sudden were the changes in the spirit of this impetuous man, 'I do believe thou art mocking me.'

'Nay, prince, I do not mock,' she answered, as if touched by his distress — as if pitying his wrecked ambition, which she knew was alone the aim and object of his intermediate wooing.

'Can I have no further claim to thy hand

'Never, cousin,' she firmly answered.

'Princess Eylla, thou hast heard of some passing love-passage of mine, that has alarmed thy jealousy, and this is thy revenge.'

'There never existed the love for jealousy to grow out of, prince. Then thou hast had love-passages while thou wert wooing me!'

The prince colored, and doggedly replied, 'I do feel assured that this alone has given color to our interview; or else thou hast fallen in love with one beneath thee!'

'Prince!' haughtily cried the princess, though a consciousness she could not hide gave less force to her reproof than she intended.

'Madam! you trifle with me,' said Prince Palipan angrily. 'Once for all — will you accept my suit?'

'No, sir.'

'Then by the eagle of thy father's sceptre, I will leap into the throne, and spurn the ladder by which I would have stepped to it.'

As he spoke these ringing words, he haughtily and with contemptuous indignity waved her away with his hand, and, turning his back upon her, left the apartment.

'The spirit of the princess sprung as if it would break from its tenement, at this insult. Her eyes flashed fire, and her cheek and lip became pale, as the blood left them to fill her surcharged heart. She followed him with her eyes, transfixed to the spot like a statue; and thus she stood, a full minute after he had departed. At length her lips parted, as if to speak — but suddenly the words of resentment and indignant wonder, that were ready to find utterance, were changed to devout expressions of gratitude; and casting herself before an altar of the sun that was in her chamber, she lifted her clasped hands, and thanked the deity she worshipped, for her escape from the danger that had awaited her from a union with the fiery and wicked prince.

This interview had unmasked his heart to her. She had suspected his ambitious interests rather than his protested love, had most weight with him in suing for her hand. That the prince loved her, her vanity, as a lovely woman, would not allow her to question; but she felt that whatever pure passion he entertained for her was overbalanced by the brilliant sceptre which was to reward that love. The prince indeed loved his cousin as much as he was capable of loving any woman. Her extreme beauty, her thousand graces and charms of mind, her spirit, and altogether faultless character, could not but have their influence over his heart.

The princess rose from the altar, and seating herself upon a pile of embroidered cushions by the window, strove to recover her calmness and self-possession. Her heart was full, and but for the insult that kindled her cheek, and burned up her tears, she would have wept for excitement — not

for grief—for though she regretted to have parted with the prince on such terms, yet on reviewing her own feelings, she justified herself in taking the course she did, and felt gratified that he had ceased longer to entertain hopes of a union which, never so distasteful to her as it had been this day, had never been contemplated by her but with painful emotions.

‘What did that fearful threat import with which he left me?’ she asked of herself as she reviewed the incidents of the interview; ‘dare he attempt—no,’ she instantly checked herself, as if the idea that had occurred to her was too improbable to be contemplated for an instant—‘yet there was meaning in his words! They were not the angry words of a hasty spirit, that are the next hour recalled or forgotten. They were spoken in a deliberate and most menacing manner. ‘Dare he attempt the throne? But two lives stand between it and his ambition—mine and my father’s! This cousin of mine must be looked after. He has the command of half the troops in the city, and may, if he have the wickedness to—but no, no, I will not do him this injustice. He meant not, he *could* not mean what he said. He has been wounded, and his temper tried. I will banish the unworthy thought, and forgive him what he uttered. Surely he could mean it not—it meant *every thing* or nothing.’

With all her charity, the lovely young princess could not altogether banish some degree of anxiety from her mind, but, as if wishing that her thoughts should be submissive to her will, she sought to change their current by dwelling upon the contemplated interview with the handsome young net-maker’s son, who had unconsciously done so much mischief.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE KNIGHT AND PERUVIAN MAIDEN.

WHEN Tzitzis, the beautiful Peruvian slave, left the chamber of the princess to seek a messenger to despatch on the secret errand intrusted to her, she glided along the corridors with her finger on her lip, as if she was fain to take that method to keep safely the great secret that filled her little heart; the greatest secret, from its nature and the high rank of the chief individual interested, that a discreet maiden could carry about with her. She moved lightly along the marble halls of the palace until she came to a staircase at the end of the corridor, which descended to a portico, beneath which courtiers and others were lounging; it being the anteroom to the imperial hall of audience.

‘Whither art tripping now, pretty Tzitzis?’ said a youth, gayly attired in a green suit laced with gold, gallantly approaching her; ‘methinks thou dost nothing but run up and down the staircase to exhibit thy neat ankles?’

‘And thou, Count Arispe,’ she said, with a smile, skillfully avoiding the kiss he attempted to place upon her lips, ‘thou art ever here when I pass of errands for my mistress, as if to show thy brave suit of green and gold, and the faint mustache that hath begun to grow on thy lip.’

This retort was received with a laugh by his companions, and the maiden wound her devious and perilous way among the gallants with an adroitness

and good humor, that gave no one offence, while she awarded none the favor he sought from her ripe lips. When she had crossed the portico, she entered a high, vaulted passage of stone, that, from the direction in which it run, communicated with a part of the palace appropriated to the life-guards of the emperor. It was hung, in its whole length, with banners captured in battle, and with the swords and spears and armor taken from enemies. At its extremity was standing a group of idle soldiers, and two or three officers of an inferior grade, one of whom no sooner descried the slave approaching, than he left his companions, who followed him with a light laugh and a word of pleasant raillery, and hastened to meet her. He was very young, but of good stature and figure, and rather good-natured than handsome.

'Elec,' she said, 'do not think now, as I know you do by your self-complacent smile, that I am here for the third time since noon, on purpose to see you. I do not care so much for you as that.'

'But, sweet pretty Tzitzis, thou dost betray thyself in thy very speech. I had not thought so,' was the reply of the youth, smiling, and attempting to kiss her, though he blushed at his own boldness.

'No — you shall not kiss me either. I did not come to be kissed, nor to be loved. I think you are very forward. I have a message from the princess,' she said, peremptorily.

'To me?' inquired the young soldier. 'What can it be?'

'Thou art ever having thyself uppermost in thy thoughts. 'Tis not *to* thee, but *for* thee.'

'Does it concern thyself?'

'There, thou canst think of nothing else but me?'

'T was of nothing else but myself just now. I would I knew the riddle o' thy mind for one five minutes!'

'T would puzzle thee to know any woman's so long. But this will never do, talking with thee here, and the princess ready to die for —' Here her fore-finger flew to her pretty mouth to stop it, and she became as silent, all at once, as if sound had never gone forth from her closed lips.

'The princess dying!' repeated her lover, with the earnestness of alarm

'Thou art a fool, Elec,' she said, sharply.

'Thou hast sharpened thy wit upon me till, verily, thou hast worn out my brains,' answered the somewhat dull young soldier, blushing and laughing.

'The steel worn off in the sharpening should have served to temper thee rather, methinks. But it has not, I see. Yet thou hast quite brain enough to do what I would have thee.'

'Why dost thou love me, if I be such a fool?' said the lover, somewhat hurt.

'I never said I loved thee.'

'But thou dost, Tzitzis; and thou hast said so often when thou hast walked with me by moonlight on the battlement, as I watched.'

The maiden blushed, and said, laughing,

'Well, I suppose I have to love you, Elec, because you are so foolish nobody else will.'

'Thou dost not mean half thou sayest, thou mischievous gypsy; and I will avenge myself on thee by kissing thee,' said the youth, growing bold.

'No, thou shalt not.'

'Wilt thou kiss *me*?'

'No.'

Dost mean it?'

'Yes.'

'Then I will not anger thee by pressing thee.'

'I said yes,' she said, archly.

'I thought thou didst mean to say yes to thy no.'

'I said *no*, and I said *yes*. But thou shouldst never ask me if you may kiss me.'

'No?'

'No. For I will be sure to say no.'

'Why so?'

'Maidens must say something at such times, and they always say *no* — 't would be so silly to say *yes*.'

'Then thou wilt never let me kiss thee?'

'I did not say so. I told thee not to ask me; if you did, I should say *no*.'

'Then how shall I ever kiss thee?'

'In this way, my pretty youth,' said, in a gay tone, an old officer of the court passing at that moment unobserved, taking the lovely girl's face between his two palms, and giving her a gallant salute. This is the way the minx means. Thou art a dull lover to need lessons in kissing from a grey-beard.'

The officer, laughing, passed on through the gallery in which they stood, while Tzitzis, after recovering from her confusion, elevated her finger and shook it at her backward wooer.

'Now thou didst see that! But it was not my fault. He did n't ask me, if he had I should have told him no. You are *so* slow of comprehension.'

'Then I will be so no longer. I have learned the lesson.'

With this he threw his arms about her, and kissed her so ardently, that she was forced to slap him in the face before he would stop.

'Now thou art as much the other way. You are certainly the most troublesome lover a poor girl ever had to get along with. Here I have been half an hour trying to teach you a little lesson you ought to have learned long ago — you ought — and you had to learn it at last from old Lord Vepotani. Really, if I did not love you, I would n't have another word to say to you.'

'Pr'y thee, sweet! be not angry.'

'No — I do n't care enough about you to be angry with you,' she said, petulantly.

The gods a-mercy! what a weathercock. It's now fair — it's now foul.'

Hold your tongue, and listen to me. Here is a signet;' and she held up to him the gem given her by her mistress.

'I see it. 'T is an emerald.'

'T is a topaz.'

'Beshrew me — 't is a topaz.'

'Nay — now 't is an emerald!'

'I would have sworn it.'

'Sworn what?'

'T is an emerald — nay, a topaz.'

'What color are my eyes? Dost thou know so much?'

'I could never look into them steady.'

'Look now!' and she fixed upon him a pair of the most brilliant, laughing black eyes Peruvian maiden ever did mischief with.'

'They are — they are —' and the simple young man looked very hard at them.

'Well, what are they?'

'They are not green.'

'No?'

'No — topazes are green.

'Emeralds are green.'

'Yes — they are not blue, I think.'

'The eyes, or the emeralds?'

'The eyes — do keep them quiet. They are not black.'

'Not black?'

'Is a diamond black?'

'No, it is pure light.'

'How look they set in jet?'

'Like dark fire.'

'Such are thine eyes!'

'The diamond of Ix! thou hast made a speech will atone for some of thy less happy ones,' answered the maiden, laughing. 'By the time we have been married one year thou wilt be another man. Take this signet now and do as I bid thee. Thou knowest where the net-maker's street is, on the other side of the canal, not a great way from the armory?'

'T is nearly opposite here.'

'Take this signet; and see thou lose it not, nor show it to any human being, save him to whom you are sent. For this is no common matter thou art trusted on. Put it in thy bosom.'

'I will keep it as safely here, sweet Tzitzis, as if it were thyself in person,' he said, placing it within the folds of the sash that passed across his shirt of mail.

'Thou art improving each minute, Elec; 't is a pity I could not be with thee more, to civilize thee.'

'Marry me.'

'Bold enough, indeed!' she replied, turning her head away over her shoulder, with a pouting mouth. 'I shall not give thee any more lessons. It is quite time thou wast gone on thy errand. Haste!'

'Thou hast not given it me yet?'

'T is in thy bosom.'

'But the errand?'

'You are so trying, and I have so much to say to you when I see you, you drive it entirely out of my head.' She blushed as if she knew she had attributed her neglect to any cause but the true one. 'Go to the palace-pier and take a boat and cross to the net-maker's street to the house of Mahco, the net-maker, which overhangs the canal, just below the Tirovi gardens. Inquire there for one Montezuma, his son, and tell him the princess commands his presence forthwith at the palace.'

'How shall I know him?'

'Dost thou not remember the day after the last festival of the new moon a youth came here to bring a silken net to the luxurious Lord Esca, for him to lounge upon his divan and catch gold-fish from the little marble lake in his sleeping chamber with it?'

'I do remember it.'

'But, do you remember him?'

'He was short, with a red beard.'

'No, no; that was a waterman, who stood by him. It was he who tapped me on the cheek, and kissed me. Dost remember now? I would not have put thee in mind of this, but you have such a memory. Short, with a red beard! He was tall, and looked like a prince, yet was courteous and gentle,

and asked me to sing him a Peruvian ballad, for he had a sister who sang and played the basulan, but sang no songs of Peru.

'Didst thou?'

'After you left the court, vexed because he kissed me, — I could n't help it, no more than I could old Lord Vepotani, — I did sing to him a little ballad. He then told me where his sister lived, 't was in sight from the palace, and bade me not to forget, when the princess let me go abroad into the city, to call and see his sister, and teach her the Peruvian air he said he liked so well. Are you jealous, Elec?' she asked, in conclusion, with the most natural *naiveté* conceivable.

'Not a bit — so thou dost not want this fine young man to come and see thee?'

'I? No, no. There is somebody else that — I shall assuredly let this secret out if he is not soon off. Go, good Elec. This net-maker command to accompany thee on thy return to the palace. Let no one observe thee, going or coming, nor learn thy errand. Be speedy and cautious, and I do n't know what reward thou wilt get from me.'

'Shall I find thee here to lead me to the princess with him?'

'You must not land here, nor must you take a boatman; but row yourself across and back. Run the boat into the dark basin that flows beneath the palace terrace, to the foot of the water-stairs, and there land. I will meet you there. Good bye!'

With this parting, she bounded from him, and was flying back along the gallery, when, seeing him looking after her from the spot on which she had left him, she stopped, and with impatient gestures waved his instant departure, and lingered till she saw him turn and quit the passage. Then, springing to the stone shelf of one of the lofty, narrow apertures for admitting light into the gallery, she beheld him by the moonlight cross the battlement, and descend a broad flight of steps that wound around a circular tower that flanked that wing of the palace, to the paved terrace, the distant boundary of which was the bright water, with its moving city of boats. She watched until she saw him disappear among the columns that lined the edge of the terrace; and shortly after beheld a boat shoot out into the canal, propelled by a single man, whom, by his shining casque and figure, she knew, even at that distance, must be her messenger.

'I do pray,' she said, as she prepared to bound to the pavement, 'he will deliver it properly, and bring the young man with him. My sweet princess would never forgive me, if he should not succeed, and blame me for not sending a trustier messenger. But then Elec is my lover; and if he is a little dull, he is good-hearted, and loves me. I don't think I would give him, as a lover, for any knight in the palace.'

'Wouldst thou not, pretty bird?' said one, who at the same instant received her form in his arms, as she sprung from the elevated shelf of the window to the floor.

Tzitzis half shrieked, and then disengaging herself, hit the individual smartly in the face.

'What art thou ever in the way for, Sulukia?' she demanded, in a half-displeased tone. 'Now go and gossip what thou hast listened to all over the palace.'

The individual addressed was a very fat little man, with a bald head, and a broad, farcical countenance. His costume was most singular for its absurdity and motley hues. Every article he wore seemed to have been made

expressly to reverse the usual fashion of men's habits, and to display a perverse contrast of gay colors. He wore a rich scarlet cap of velvet, which was shaped like a shoe, with the sole uppermost; and his sandals were ornamented, on the top of the foot, with very small brazen helmets, which tinkled like bells.

'What art looking after i' the window, sweetheart?' he asked, with the ogle of a buffoon.

'I did get up there, seeing thee coming, to get out of thy way, fool.'

'Now I will swear by the beard o' the princess thou didst get up there to jump into my arms as I came by! I hav n't been a court fool all my life not to know what women are?'

'What hath thy folly, Sulukis, to do with thy knowledge?' she asked, with a frown.

'Doth it not take a wise man to measure wisdom? Answer me that.'

'Yes.'

'Then doth it take a fool to measure folly?'

'Thou art ever speaking against women, because thou never didst find favor in their eyes.'

'Not a lady i' the palace but looketh with a sideling eye on me when I walk about in my holiday attire. I tell thee thou art ignorant. I am in favor. The princess hath laughed at my jests.'

'She hath laughed at thee, fool! Go aside and let me pass on.'

'Nay, if she laugh, I care not, if she laugh at, or with me. Half the world is laughing at the other half since 't was first made. I would not be out o' the fashion o' it.'

'Thou art most strangely so in the wardrobe, fat Sulukes! Thou art enough to frighten any one!'

'Is not my cap green velvet, and hath it not a diamond to glitter in it?'

'T is a sandal — 't is no cap. Why dost wear it on thy head?'

'To show where my wisdom lies. Other men wear their sandals on their feet, in which, verily, without word-play, lieth their understandings. Mine, the gods have put in my head side, and I do wear o' the outside the indication o' its presence. I will tell the a secret, sweetheart.'

'What is it?'

'I am in love with thee.'

'Thou hast told that secret to every maid in the palace that would give thee a two minutes discourse with them. Go to, fool!'

'The emperor saith I have more wisdom than all his court. He doth never undertake any matter of moment, but after consulting his wise counsellors, he finisheth by asking me for my opinion. Because, says he, there are but two ways of doing a thing — a wrong and a right. The right he calleth a spear with one point — the wrong, he likeneth to a star with divers points shooting every way but the right.'

'He getteth the right way — that is the spear, from his counsellors, and that he may know which of the points of the star point most opposite to it, he asketh thee, knowing thy answer will be to that point which is most to be shunned. Thy folly is the index which ever pointeth to the mischief.'

'Nay, but he doth oftentimes ask my opinion ere he ask that of his wise-men.'

'That first, knowing of thee the wrong way, he may discern the right. Doubtless he doth truly say of thee thou hast more wisdom in thee than all his counsellors. But 'tis only folly thou hast at last.'

'Nay — may not a finger-board that pointeth out to the traveller the precipice, be as good a finger-board as that which pointeth him back from it. Give me a kiss, sweetheart.'

'Nay, I never have let fools kiss me.'

'I did see Elec kissing thee but now, which made me hasten from t'other end of the gallery, while the humor was in thee.'

'Humph! What is Elec to thee, witless? He hath more wit in his finger-nails than thou in thy whole body. Wouldst thou make him thy fellow in folly?

'Nay, fellows in wits, but not in folly. This is the difference, look ye, between wit and folly. Wit causeth a man to know when he is hungry, and when he hath eat enough; when he is dry, and when he hath drunk enough; when he is sleepy, and when he hath had sleep enough. But it giveth him nothing better than black bread for his hunger, water for his thirst, and, a naked board to sleep on. Folly causeth him to know how to find dainty things for his palate, and to wash his dinner down with generous wines — to choose down to sleep on, instead of boards, and to sleep when he chooseth to lie down. Wit is common to man and brute beasts — folly hath her home only in the breasts of fools. Elec, therefore, hath not folly, but wit. We are diamond and flint to each other.'

'And thou art folly — the flint; and he, wit — the diamond.'

'True, sweetheart! I emit the spark that kindleth the flame 'neath the crucible which burneth thy diamond of wit to charcoal. I wonder he left not thy mouth black!'

'Out upon thee, Sulukis! I never knew thee so rude of speech!

'I learned it from the knights — they are enough to corrupt one even more virtuous in his morals. The emperor hath forbade me keeping company with them.'

'My mistress forbade me to hold discourse with thee.'

'She showeth her wisdom. Princesses should never let their confidants go in the way o' temptation.'

'If thou dost not move thy fat body out o' my way, and let me go — I will call to yonder young knights, and have them pommel thee.'

'The emperor hath bade me avoid their company. So if such be thy humor, sweetheart, I will not delay here. Good bye, pretty Tzitzis! Do not forget the distinction I have taught thee between folly and wit. When thy lover, Elec, kisseth thee again, remember he is but charcoal, and wipe thy lips after.' With these words he stood aside from the recess and let her pass.

'I will pay thee this, fool!' she said, as she flew past him.

'There goeth a woman who hath common sense —' soliloquized the corpulent jester, looking after her with dignified gravity. 'I cannot away with it! 'Tis troublesome enough in men, but I ha' no mercy on't in a woman.'

'Flying back again! as if thou wert a hare, and a brace of hounds were after thee!' said, in a lively tone, one of the young courtiers, as Tzitzis was re-crossing the portico to return to the wing of the palace she had left. And, the young man caught her hand.

'Nay, detain me not; I am on the princess' affairs.'

'It is of the princess I would speak to thee.'

'Quick, then, for I have been long detained by the prating Sulukis!'

'Thou needest not haste, pretty Peruvian — I saw the prince passing but now to pay a visit to her rooms.'

'Poor princess!'

'Why dost thou sigh?'

'I am sorry she hath been troubled by him.'

'T is of this I would talk with thee. I think she loves him not?'

'He is to be her husband.'

'The emperor hath decreed it — but not the fates!'

'Nor hath love! I did suspect it. 'T is true she loves him not, maiden?'

'I dare not speak my mind to thee, sir — I am a slave.'

'I would not betray thee, by the gods! Dost thou not know the lord Cuiri well enough to trust him? Come aside a little!'

'I know thee but slightly, sir,' she said, with deep respect, 'but I know the good opinion my mistress hath of thee.'

'I am glad I have such favor with our beloved princess. Alas! I feared she loved not Prince Palipan.'

'Who does, my lord?'

'Truly, do not I. Look, then, Tzitziz! — I know thy devotion to thy mistress, and will now tell thee, that, if the princess like not this union, she shall not sacrifice herself. The emperor himself shall not urge her to it. The empire were better without an emperor, than such an one as Prince Palipan.'

'Dost thou think thus, my lord?' she exclaimed, with surprise and pleasure on her bright face.

'Not only I, but many other men,' answered the young noble sternly.

The maiden stood silent and reflecting for a moment, and then said: —

'This devotion to the princess' happiness, by the noble gentlemen of the court, will make her happy. But she will give countenance to no act such as your bold speech darkly hints at.'

'How dost thou understand me?'

'That the will of the emperor and the ambition of the prince must be resisted, with arms, if need be.'

'Thou art quick. I did mean this.'

'The princess will never save herself and sacrifice her father.'

'Nay, you mistake. The emperor will not come to harm. It would be only to place the princess *alone* on the throne. She hath wisdom to govern us. The emperor hath proclaimed his intention to abdicate. Let him resign to her alone.'

'This is a deep matter, my lord. I tremble.'

'I would have you broach it to your mistress, ere she have gone too far in encouraging the prince.'

'Thy father is the first noble of the empire — what saith he?'

'He is imbecile. I am only recognized as the Duke of Cuiri — I am alone answerable for my conduct. The princess is beloved, and must not be sacrificed, if the true hearts that beat around her can save her.'

The maiden fixed her large eyes penetratingly upon his face for an instant, and then dropped them in silence.

'Maiden, I read that look, I think, aright.'

'My lord,' said Tzitziz, impressively, 'I pray you pardon me, but I fear thy passion will be as fatal to the princess' happiness as the haughty prince's ambition.'

'Thou art a fearless speaker.'

'Because I love my mistress. My lord, she hath ever spoken well of you — because she never suspected what I have now, for the first time, dis-

cerned, that, under your modest and respectful demeanor in her presence, was concealed love.'

'It was concealed, maiden,' said the youthful noble, with feeling; 'I have never breathed to mortal ear what thy woman's eye hath now discerned. I do love your mistress with a consuming passion. But, like a faithful subject, I have let it secretly prey upon my life, ere I would she should know it.'

'She hath never known it. Let her still be ignorant of it, my lord! If there had been a kindred feeling for thee, in her own bosom, it would long since have betrayed itself — for love in woman cannot be hid as in thy sex. She hath ever spoken of thee in the even voice of common discourse. If ever she praised thee, 't was in such terms as become a virgin princess speaking of a brave noble of the realm — a part of her empire, not of her heart.'

'I would she should not know it,' he said with ill-suppressed emotion.

'Thou art herein wise, noble duke, and showest thy devotion to the princess by this denial. I will not speak of it. Yet,' he said, detaining her as she was leaving him; 'yet, maiden,' repeated he earnestly, 'wilt thou, for pity of my love, speak to her of me, as if by accident, when thou art next in her presence, and by her manner of discourse, and by watching her cheek and eye, as thou dost skillfully, try the gauge of her heart — judge if there be room for thought of me in it.'

'I will do it for pity of thy passion. But thou dost trifle with thy noble-hearted feelings, my good lord, to let them waste thus in hopeless love. Thou knowest a princess may not espouse beneath her rank.'

'A princess — but not an empress.'

The maiden started, with a mingled look of astonishment and fear. 'My lord!'

The noble smiled, and then said, in a low tone of confidence, taking her hand —

'Thou hast my life in thy hands. Serve me faithfully, and I will be thy friend.'

'My lord,' said she, with embarrassment, withdrawing her hand, 'I will do what I can for thee. But, alas! I fear thy ruin from this thing. I would rather thou wert emperor than Prince Palipan. If the princess could but love thee!'

'She hath not been wooed. Love will beget love, maiden. What dost thou think?'

'She will never love thee, my lord,' said the Peruvian, firmly.

'I do fear so. Take, sweet angel, my suit in thy hands, and let me hear from thee if there be hope.'

'If not — thou wilt give her to Prince Palipan in revenge; wilt not?' she asked, with an arch smile.

'Nay — I can never, whatever the issue, seek other than the happiness of the fair and gentle princess. If she love me not, I will die to secure her happiness in her own way.'

'Even to placing Prince Palipan on the throne beside her?'

'Even this — even *this*! should she command me.'

'Then thou art worthy of her love. I will aid thee with all a woman's wit. I did think jealousy of the prince, and not my mistress' happiness, had influenced thee.'

'Thou didst most deeply wrong my love and honor, maiden.'

'My lord,' said a gay voice near him, at which the maiden took flight, and disappeared beyond an angle of the gallery; 'thou art a successful suitor; if I may judge by the attention of ear of the fair Peruvian. She hath flown like a frightened bird. I shall ne'er get near her again for another favor, if such be already the fruit o' thy ear whispering.'

The young noble colored, and then laughed, as he passed his arm through that of the old Lord Vepotani, and led him, in deep discourse, towards a distant part of the palace.

CHAPTER IX.

THE EMPEROR AND HIS NEPHEW.

WHEN the prince quitted the apartments of the Princess Eylla with such menacing language on his lips, he strode through the range of gilded saloons that led to his quarter of the palace, with the quick, fiery tread of an enraged man. His hand was firmly grasped upon the hilt of his sword, as if he would have avenged his wrongs with it, yet felt he could not; while his brow was lowered and stern, and his lips compressed, with the struggle of the strong passions the decision of the princess had let loose. The attendant slaves that stood in the galleries trembled, as they fell submissively before him, with their faces to the pavement; while one or two courtiers that advanced a step as if to address him, retired from his path again in silence, and let him pass on uninterrupted. At length, as he was crossing a small court that separated the princess' apartments from his own scarcely less magnificent suite of chambers, a slave stepped forth from the shadow of a statue that had concealed him, and throwing himself on one knee, caught the fringe of his cloak. The impatient prince would have spurned him with his foot, and passed on, when his face arrested him.

'Is it thou, slave?' he demanded, in a tone as if his anger had found a suitable victim on which momentarily to vent itself.

'Gneicha, the Tlascalan,' answered the slave, with mingled boldness and submission.

'Why hast thou lingered? Thy head shall pay for it.'

'I have news.'

'Stand; and I would hear of that on which I sent thee. Didst thou get it?'

'T is here, my prince,' he said, taking from the folds of his scarf a single white flower, of the most exquisite beauty, and presenting it to him.

'What didst thou call it?' asked the prince, gazing upon it with admiration.

'The otol. There are but seven trees in the empire, and each tree bears but a single flower.'

'The odor hath already filled the palace. Hath it surely the power thou didst promise for it?'

'It hath, prince.'

'If it fail, thy head shall answer it. I know thy race are skilled in magic, and are children of the Demon Mechoa. Who doth know of it save thyself?'

'The gardener.'

'And he is a Tlascalan?'

'He is my father, and a priest of Mechoa.'

'Thou art of an accursed race,' said the prince, with loathing; 'nevertheless thou hast skill, and I must make use of it when love fails me. I would thou hadst brought it an hour since. But,' he added instantly afterward, 'it may be best as it is. Take it to my chamber, and there await my coming. The fragrance is wonderful. Hath it no danger?'

'To none but maidens, prince. This flower the gods created for their own pleasure, and forbade the first man and woman to touch it, as it was sacred to them. Yet the woman, tempted by its fragrance, lingered about the otol tree till the Spirit Mechoa bade her pluck it, and place it on her forehead, promising her it would make her immortal. Forgetting that she was then immortal, she did so, and from that instant became mortal. The flower has ever since been sacred to Mechoa, and fatal to every virgin who, tempted by its beauty, places it in her bosom.'

'And placed on her heart, it creates irresistible love?'

'Yes, my prince, or death.'

'I have heard of the wonderful properties of the otol, but did hold it, as I half do now, but an idle tale. I will have present opportunity to test its peculiar virtue. Take it with thee, and await my coming.'

'I know not what relentless maiden, prince, you wish to punish——'

'Nay—silence! Thou hast had full license already.'

'I would tell thee, noble prince, of a maiden, fair as the brightest virgin the sun ever bore from the altar of sacrifice to his bridal chamber.'

'I have no humor for thy tale,' said the prince, though not so decidedly as to defeat the Tlascalan, who continued—

'She is the loveliest virgin in the empire. Her eyes are like stars, when the evening dews are falling; her cheeks like the roseate tinge of the summer sky that lingers when the sun hath set. Her lips are like the flower of the Fatsiza tree, and the matchless statue of the goddess Vichu hath not more symmetry than her person. If thou hast heard the *tsi* singing to its mate in the groves of thy Hontal gardens, thou wilt best judge of her voice; and if thou hast seen the dark flow of the river Itsima at midnight, thou wilt know something of the hue of her wavy hair.'

'By the goddess Vichu! I must see this maiden. Who is she, and what is her degree?'

'A serf's daughter. She lives by the water, in the net-makers' street, and hath a lover who hath hot blood enough in him for a noble.'

'I did half guess it,' said the prince to himself. 'Where hast thou seen her?'

'Within the hour, upon her balcony.'

'T is the same! Why didst thou note her? What purpose hast thou in view here? I see the glitter of thy restless eye. Out with it.'

'I did, on discovering her charms, but offer her a flower of a bunch I had also gathered in the garden, when a youth, who was in converse with her, rudely seized me by the throat, and thrust me from the walk. I did then swear to avenge myself on both!'

'Tlascalan! I do find no man, not even a slave, doth good service for another unless self-interest lie to the bottom. I see that thy wrong will bind thee truer to my own purposes. I know this maiden, and love her—for never have my eyes looked on such beauty.'

'Not even the Princess Eylla,' said the slave, in an under tone of raillery.

'Name me f ncess Eylla, vile slave, and I will slay thee,' cried the prince, angrily.

He walked away a few paces, as if under the influence of the feelings the words of the slave had rekindled. 'This haughty princess,' he said to himself. 'Yes, yes! I would have tried the virtue of this flower, which she hath never seen, and placed it in her bosom to kindle her cold affections into love for me! But that is past—that is past! She shall die! Then the throne! But the Emperor! He, too, shall cease to live! Then, *then* am I monarch! I will let this course be first tried ere I draw the sword of treason with which I menaced her. I might, if this otol have the power attributed to it, make her love me. But I scorn her love. She shall die!' The last words were spoken aloud, and in so determined a tone, that the Tlascalcan started with surprise and fear.

'Thou dost mean the youth, prince,' he said, referring the words to another. '*She* is too fair for death.'

'Thou knowest not what thou art saying, Tlascalcan,' said the prince, pleased that the eunuch was at fault. 'But I need not thy service in this matter at present. I have already sent one to manage it for me. So, on thy life, meddle not with it. Nor dare avenge thy own wrong on this young bondman who seized thee by the throat. Higher revenge than thine hath appropriated this victim. Go, see to it. Go, now, and bear the flower to my chamber. I shall soon be there, and command thee further.'

The Tlascalcan made a low obedience, and passed the prince in the direction of the entrance to his apartments.'

'There goes a useful villain to me! When Casipeti, the maschal of the palace, shall have brought the maiden hither, he will then do me good service. 'T is strange, now I think of it, this maschal should undertake this matter so readily; I knew not he was so ready to serve me, having himself some daughters, I am told, that are growing up to womanhood.'

'Save you, prince,' said a stout-built person, in a rich dress, half military, half civic, who crossed the court at the instant; and pausing as he went in front of him to make a dignified reverence, he was continuing on his way to an opposite door, when the prince, looking up, fixed his eyes upon him steadily, and then cried—

'Sir maschal, is it thou?'

'I am Casipeti, the maschal of the palace, at your service, your highness,' said the individual.

'When didst thou return to the palace, and wherefore hast thou delayed to visit me?'

'Return! your highness,' repeated the officer, with surprise.

'Nay, come aside, where the splashing of the fountain will drown our voices. I did forget we might be overheard, and do prejudice to thy character.'

'I do not understand your highness,' answered the officer, with some alarm.

'Art thou not Casipeti?'

'Yes, your highness.'

'Is not thy office that of steward of the palace?'

'It is, your highness.'

'Then why dost thou presume to trifle with me, fellow?'

'Nay, my noble prince,' cried the man, falling on his knees before him, and trembling; 'I do not trifle with thee.'

'Did I not see thee, disguised at a waterman, in the square of the temple, at evening sacrifice?'

'No, my prince.'

'Didst thou not propose to me a scheme for my own pleasure and revenge, and proffer thy services?'

'Never, noble prince.'

'Didst thou not receive from me my signet, villain?' demanded the prince, laying his hand upon him.

'Never, merciful prince, never! I have not left the palace in three weeks.'

The prince gazed on his face for a few moments, with the penetrating and inquiring glance of suspicion, and then released him.

'Some one hath imposed on thee, my prince,' said the steward, rising, and shaking with fear.

'I do see it plainly, now I have looked at thee well. The man I took for thee had an eye thine would quail beneath. He had thy height and breadth of shoulder, and something of thy air; but thy slavish spirit and his bold one were not kindred, I'll be sworn. Go. *Stay!* Is there another of thy name in Mexico, who hath thy air and step?'

'One, I have heard, called Casipeti, the waterman.'

'It is he,' said the prince, decidedly. 'Go about thy business — nor speak of what hath now passed.'

The maschal hastily availed himself of the permission to escape. The prince stood thoughtfully gazing upon the sparkling waters as they fell in the glancing moon-beams like showers of silver drops, into the basin near which he stood.

'I have been betrayed!' he cried, after a few moments' reflection. My signet is in a traitor's hands, and mischief will come of it. He hath some plan to save this maiden and her lover, and hath thought to keep me quiet until he had effected it. Yet why should he speak of an insurrection, in which, being a serf, he must of course bear a part. It was done, doubtless, to keep me near my troops. I see I have been a tool of this waterman. But nay, it may not have been the waterman, Casipeti, the maschal hath spoken of. It may be some noble who hath taken this means to beguile me of my beauteous prize. Whoever it be, I will defeat his schemes by undertaking, if not too late, my own affair in person. By the gods! I have just conceived a scheme that will punish this haughty princess! It shall be carried out, or I know not how to avenge myself on a disdainful woman.'

With these words the prince was proceeding towards his apartments, when a page, who had been sometime waiting at a distance, met him, and said hastily,

'The emperor begs leave to speak with your highness.'

The prince muttered an impatient word or two, and then followed him to the right, across the court. They descended a magnificent flight of marble stairs, every step adorned with the statue of a god, to a vast central rotunda below, the lofty roof of which was supported by three score columns of polished marble, seventy feet in height, while the architraves and compartments of the ceiling were adorned with beautifully sculptured imagery, interspersed with exquisite paintings, in the most brilliant and ever-during colors. Crossing this rotunda, the page led the prince to a low flight of semi-circular steps, that led to a pair of ivory doors inlaid with silver. These he threw open by the slightest touch, and then retired behind the prince, who entered and

found himself in a large chamber of the most dazzling splendor. Its sides were lined with plates of Itzli, that multiplied his person a thousand times. Every panel was set in a gold border, and supported by two pillars of silver. The floor was laid with precious stones and the ceiling was covered with pearl. At the extremity of this room was a throne of solid gold, supported by two gigantic black eagles of polished ebony. Above the throne was a golden sun with rays composed of diamonds. On the left of the throne, which was vacant, was a couch or divan, of the most sumptuous description, covered with a canopy of azure silk, and hung with curtains of silver tissue. The emperor was reclining upon this couch, in a rich evening robe, a silken scarlet cap covering his white locks. Beside him, within reach of his hand, was laid his crown, which literally blazed with jewels. Upon it was laid his ivory sceptre, distinguished by a diamond of great size and wonderful brilliancy, playing in the lights with the most dazzling prismatic splendor. At a respectful distance around him knelt slaves in rich dresses, and on his left hand stood his prime minister, and two or three of the upper officers of his household. The emperor himself, appeared about sixty-five years of age, of commanding stature, and an aspect kingly. His features had been shaped by nature to wear a benevolent expression; but absolute power, and the unchecked indulgence of will and passion, had added to them a refined expression of cruelty, to the existence of which in his breast, his oppressive government but too well bore testimony. His eyes were stern and imperious in their character and sparkled black and fiercely beneath the gray, thick brows that shaded them. His lower lip was the least disagreeable feature of his face; it always seemed to wear a gentle smile, as if the lingering spirit of natural kindness, driven from point to point, had retreated there. His upper lip was ever curled with haughty imperiousness; so that his mouth seemed constantly to wear a double expression, which, save those diplomatic courtiers who had studied his face well and closely, was dangerously deceptive, as well as perplexing, to every one else who sought to guide his conduct from the temper of mind it seemed to indicate. And often was the cruel disappointment of a victim, whose hopes looking to the better, rested only on the smile, who was doomed to endure the bitter woe of a sentence he dreamt not of.

The prince entered with a free, careless step, as if he had purposely assumed it to disguise the sterner feelings of his bosom, and, approaching the emperor, half kneeled on one knee in the form of reverence, kissed his hand, and instantly resumed his erect attitude.

'I have not seen thee to-day, nephew,' said the emperor, with a smile; 'doubtless Eylla hath made large claims on thy leisure.'

'I have seen the Princess Eylla but once to-day, your majesty, and then but for a brief space,' answered the prince, with a frown.

The emperor looked up sharply at this reply, and observing that his nephew's brow was disturbed, he waved those about him to retire. When he was alone with the prince he said gravely,

'I did send for thee, nephew, to talk with thee respecting this union I have so much at heart. When the cycle of my reign ends, I would have the throne at once receive its legitimate emperor and empress.'*

* It would appear from the Aztec annals, that their monarchs reigned, each, exactly fifty-two years. But this singularity arose from a provision of their law, by which no monarch was suffered to reign for a greater or less period. If he completed the cycle upon the

'There need be but short conference then, your majesty,' said the prince bitterly. 'The princess hath already settled this matter of espousal to her own liking, I doubt not.'

'Ha! is this thy humor?' said the emperor, laughing; 'so thou hast had a lover's quarrel. Heed it not, prince! Matrimony will soon heal all such trifles. What hath the minx done to anger thee?'

'Your majesty,' answered Prince Palipan, with a kindling eye; 'I do not feel that I can jest upon this subject. It may be mirth to your majesty, but it hath little that is merry in it for my humor.'

'By the gods' sceptre! then thou art in truth vexed! So, I am sorry. What hath come to pass?'

'The princess can best tell your majesty herself. I care not to speak of my own shame.'

'Now, by the black eagle of Aztec! I will know this matter from thy own lips,' cried the emperor imperatively. And he half rose from the couch to his feet.

'The princess, then, hath declined my suit.'

'And thou art making all this matter,' he said, sinking back again upon his pillow, and speaking in an indifferent tone, 'because a silly girl hath said she cannot love thee. If thou wilt let a woman rule thee now, thou art not fit to rule an empire, nephew.'

'Your majesty, the Princess Eylla hath shown a strong and unconquerable dislike to me. She hates me, and hath this evening told me she will never consent to wed me.'

'And who asks the girl's consent, nephew,' said the emperor, in the same unmoved tone that so irritated the prince. 'Thou hast *mine*.'

'She scorns me.'

'Pay her back with love.'

'She hath insulted me.'

'Avenge thyself upon the lips, then.'

'By the sacred Temple! your majesty is inclined to be facetious,' cried the youth fiercely. 'I crave permission to take my leave.'

'Nay, stay, boy! There is something deeper in this than I had thought,' cried the emperor quickly. He then said in a serious tone,

'Tell me just what hath happened?'

'The Princess Eylla hath just said to me, in a way not to be misunderstood by any man in his senses, that she will never share the throne with her cousin, the Prince Palipan.'

'Doth she say it in truth and earnest? demanded the emperor with impetuosity. 'Did you mark her eye, as well as her voice; for they sometimes, in woman, play at countercheck?'

'I did, your majesty,' answered the prince calmly, now that he had moved the emperor.

'And parted you thus?'

'We did, your majesty.'

'T is passing wonderful. What did you, to anger her, prince?'

'Sing beneath her lattice a song, in praise of her beauty.'

throne, he immediately resigned the crown, and another was elected; but if he died before the cycle expired, the nobles assumed the government, which they administered in the name of the deceased, during the remaining years. Ulyd ascended the throne at the age of fif-
 teen, and being now nearly sixty-seven years of age, his cycle would shortly expire.

'That's it. These are times when pretty women will anger at praise of their charms, as if, like the overloaded bee, they get sated with their own sweetness. Thou didst take her in this mood. Go to her while she is soured with her displeasure, and, my crown, she will listen to you, and be as well pleased as but now she was ill-pleased.'

Thus spoke the emperor, whose passionate fondness for his child would lead him to seek palliation for her treatment to the prince. He would not at once make up his mind to exert towards her that authority which he felt he held securely in reserve, and desired, if possible, to bring her to obedience to his wishes, without severity.

'May it please your majesty,' answered the prince decidedly, 'I fully acquiesce in the princess' decision, and shall no longer trouble her with my presence.' And he paced the floor moodily.

'Say'st thou! By the gods! I have two of ye to deal with! Thy words rung well, but didst thou mean them?'

'I did, your majesty,' said the fiery prince. 'The Princess Eylla hath wounded me beyond forgiveness. If she would now come forward, and plead for my hand, I would give it to her Peruvian slave Tzitzis first.'

'By the bright sun! young man, this speech had lost thee thy head, wert thou other than thou art. As it is, I have a mind to send both of you to prison, till you come to your senses. This hath become a serious matter! Treason in my own palace. My daughter and nephew traitors!'

'Your majesty, I am no traitor.'

'Thou dost refuse the hand of the princess.'

'She hath refused mine.'

'She hath no power to do it. It is *mine*. And though thou dost not deserve it for thy hasty spirit, yet lest the empire fall to pieces for want of a head, I do give it to thee. She shall obey me.'

'The Princess Eylla, may obey thee, but the Prince Palipan is his own master.'

'Ho, guards! seize the traitor!' shouted the emperor.

Instantly issuing from a hitherto invisible recess in the rear of the throne, half a score of the emperor's body guards stood in his presence. Their captain looked silently at him and at the prince, and looking round and seeing no one else, asked,

'Whom, your majesty?'

The politic prince had, in the meanwhile, thrown himself upon one knee before the emperor, and said in a low tone, 'pardon, uncle.' The emperor made no reply to the officer, but remained a moment silent and thoughtful. At length he waved his hand to the guards to retire.

'Go—not now! But shouldst thou hear me call again, delay not to ask *who*, but seize him, whoever he be, thou findest present with me.'

'Thy rank, prince, hath saved thee! Had they not hesitated, and laid the first finger on thee, thou shouldst have known the comforts of our imperial dungeon, and the cost of an emperor's anger. Thou dost repent, then?'

'I do.'

'Then leave me, for I am little in the mood for thy company. I shall send for my daughter, and have this matter put to rest. Beware how thou darest to trifle with me or her, as thou hast done this night. I would be alone.'

The emperor waved his hand impatiently as he spoke, and the prince took his leave, without offering the usual homage of the knee.

The emperor looked after him as he strode from the audience chamber, and shook his head.

‘He will make a good monarch, but I fear me a bad husband for my poor Eylla. But the sacrifice must be made, both by herself and me. I would save her from it. But I cannot let the imperial line of the Aztecs end in my person. No—the princess must wed her cousin. I will send for her! Nay—I will visit her alone, in her own chamber. I would see her without the face she will make up to meet me with, if I send for her here. I would find her in her mood.’

With these words, the emperor rose from his couch, and leaning on the arm of his prime minister, who re-entered as soon as the prince departed, bade him proceed by a private gallery towards the apartments of the princess.

CHAPTER X.

THE STORY OF THE NET-MAKER.

MONTEZUMA remained sometime in deep and perplexed thought, after the departure of the conspirators, endeavoring to foresee the ultimate tendency of the revolt. His mind was vibrating between his regard for the princess, who he felt must be involved in the consequences, whatever they might be, and his love for his country.

‘Brother,’ said the soft voice of Fatziza, who, descending from her room, had stolen to his side after having for sometime tenderly watched the dark aspect of his countenance. ‘Brother,’ was a second time repeated in still tenderer tones, before he looked up.

‘Sister,’ he said with a smile, touching her cheek playfully.

‘Thank the gods for that word and smile!’ she said, fervently. ‘I did believe another spirit than thine had possessed thy bosom. Thou art my brother again.’

‘I am ever thy brother, dear Fatziza,’ he said affectionately. ‘What dost thou wish?’

‘I scarcely know. Strange events are ripening all around, and evil seems to threaten those I love. Sismarqui hath come in and gone forth, hastily, and is mailed like a knight. The house has been thronged with deep-voiced, stern-looking men, and I have heard fearful talk of bloody contests, death, and conflagration. What hath happened, brother, and how art thou involved?’

‘I will tell thee, sweet. Sit by me on this settle. Thou shalt hear, for thou art a sensible woman, as well as an affectionate sister, and will one day be a loving wife. Nay, blush not so quickly. I did speak of what should be each maiden’s pride. Here is our father. He hath waked from his afternoon nap, to be in happy ignorance of all that hath transpired. Let him not hear it bluntly. He shall tell thee now what else I would have explained. I got it from him in my boyhood.’

As he spoke a venerable and dignified man, in the full vigor of green old age, with an erect figure and a firm countenance, entered from the shop in the rear.

'Good even, children!' he said kindly. 'Thou hast had many of thy young friends in to see thee, son, judging by the noise of voices that at length drove sleep away. But 't is time I were up to supper.'

'T is ready, father,' said Fatziza.

'First, sir,' said Montezuma, 'tell Fatziza the tale of the origin of our empire. She hath heard it not from thee. I would she should hear it now for a certain reason.'

'T is what thou shouldst know, daughter, that thou mayest worship right-ly. Our race is descended from the Great Spirit, the sun, the creator of all things. After the world was filled with inhabitants, the people became so wicked, that Avandu ordered Tezpis, the only good man living, to build a ship on the mountain of Colhuacan, and dwell in it.'

'Nay, father, I am impatient. Speak of the Aztec,' said Montezuma, interrupting him.

'I will, son, I will, when I come to it. When Tezpis had got safely into the ship with his wife,' continued the old man, who related his story in his own way, 'the sea came up suddenly over the whole earth, drowning every soul, and floating the ship upon the top of the mountain. After drifting about many months, Tezpis saw the sun appear, and heard the voice of the Great Spirit from it command the waters to withdraw. He then sent a vulture forth to see if he could find land. But the bird, finding dead bodies to feed on, did not return. He then sent an eagle; and then a humming-bird, which returned, holding in its beak a small branch covered with leaves. Tezpis then looked forth, and saw that the earth was verdant, and left his ship and sacrificed to the gods. After this he had fifteen sons, who, quarrelling one with the other, a dove brought them an olive branch having fifteen leaves, saying, if they plucked those they should never quarrel more. Each of the sons plucked a leaf and ate it, when, finding they spoke no longer intelligibly to one another's ears, they dispersed, each man his own way. The eldest of these sons was called Cohuala, and he spoke the only tongue of the fifteen the gods could understand. He grew to be a great nation, and, wandering over the earth, came into this country of Mexitla, and founded an empire.'

'And is the Emperor Ulyd descended from him?' asked Fatziza.

'No; but thou art, and all the Mexitili,' answered the net-maker. 'The empire flourished under the favor of the Great Spirit for nearly a thousand years, and so peaceful and happy was the land, that war and the art of war had been forgotten. Not a sword nor armor of offence or defence was known. We were a blessed nation, and the sun was our father and our benefactor. At length, an intractable nation of warriors, clad in steel, and whose trade was war, hearing of our happy country, poured from the north upon us, under their prince, Aztec, and conquered us, slaying our kings and all the royal family. This fierce conqueror was Aztec the First. His race has sat on the throne seven hundred years, and the descendants of his steel-clad warriors are our nobility.'

'And what became of the original, happy race of Mexitili, father?' asked Fatziza, with interest.

'They became slaves to their new masters, and remain so to this day. I am one of them, daughter,' said the old man, with some feeling.

'And I am one,' repeated Montezuma, suddenly rising, and speaking with stern impetuosity. 'It is this I would have had my father tell thee, sister, that thou mightest know wherefore my brow is dark and my thoughts heavy. 'This night,' and his voice was deep and solemn, 'our ancient race are to rise in their strength, as one man, and throw off the yoke of their masters.'

‘Son, what is this thou sayest?’ cried the net-maker, with surprise, his eyes shining with delight.

‘It is as I have told thee. Within the three hours thou hast been sleeping, old man, a nation has awaked from a sleep of centuries.’

‘Brother, thou hast not roused the people?’ cried Fatziza, laying her hand upon his arm.

‘I have not, but the gods have! I am but their instrument.’

‘And Sismarqui?’ she gasped.

‘Is another. We are banded together, we and those thou hast seen here, to deliver our country.’

‘Son, dost thou speak truly?’

‘In three hours thirty thousand Mexitili will be in arms. The revolt hath ripened into full fruit from the seed, without stalk or leaf.’

‘I would I had a good sword!’ cried the vigorous old man. ‘I would not be behind the best youth among ye.’

‘Thou shalt have one, father. Sister, quell this rising fear in your bosom. Remember you are my sister, and for my sake be firm. Neither Sismarqui nor I will come to harm. Thou must wait at home here patiently the issue. Father, I am now going forth to mark the spirit of the people. I will return with arms for thee.’

‘Do my old senses dream this? Am I awake? Hath it come at last?’ he cried, as he embraced his son. ‘The gods go with thee, noble boy! Thou art worthy of the celestial race from which you sprung.’

Montezuma left the dwelling, and at the threshold met Casipeti entering.

‘Casipeti, how goes the city?’

‘The different quarters are well organized, and the most surprising unity and discipline seems to pervade all hearts. Every man will be at his post at the first glare of the signal light; and so well instructed are they, that if no signal should be given till dawn, not a foot till then would stir forth. I have in person visited each quarter.’

‘I was going now for this very purpose. I do feel a new spirit burn in my bosom at this intelligence. I feel anxious about the citizens of the quarter of the Lapidaries. I have had no communication with them since the sun set, and fear they are indifferently organized. I will go thither now. Accompany me, good Casipeti? On my return I will look in upon the band of brave youth whom I have chosen to take possession with me first of the hill and Temple of War.’

‘I would go with thee, Montezuma; but I came hither now but to tell thee, — what I forgot at our meeting, — take heed to thy fair sister.’

‘Wherefore, Casipeti?’

‘The masked knight who saluted her cheek is none other than the prince.’

‘How knowest thou this?’

‘I will tell thee. I was witness to the fray, and followed the knight, inventing in my mind the while some plausible scheme to serve him, and my purpose to learn who he was, for twice hath the same knight, in different guises, — but I knew him by his steed and air, — been to my own dove-cote. I found occasion, after the sacrifice in the court of the temple, to draw near him, scarce with any formed design, save that I did intend to offer him my aid in prosecuting his amour.’

‘With my sister?’

‘Pardon, good youth; ’t was to feel his pulse where I thought it throbbed the truest. He confessed his love and passion, and at once entered into my plans. Unskilled in deceit, I unintentionally gave him my name, Casipeti.

as he demanded it, and he instantly asked if 't was Casipeti, my namesake, the maschal of the palace. I stammered, yes, and he then frankly gave me his confidence. I promised to favor his views here, and the better to deceive him as to my person, for I thought he once suspected the cheat, I hinted of insurrection, and advised him to be on his guard.'

'This was rash.'

'I did not then think insurrection so near at hand, though hoping for it, or I should have been more guarded. But he will scarce heed it. At length I promised to bring thy sister captive to the palace; and he, to give me admission to his presence, took from his finger this signet and gave it me. He then lifted his mask, and I saw, to my surprise, what I had not suspected, that 't was the prince.'

'T is indeed the prince's crest,' said Montezuma, surveying the gem. 'Thou hast taken great liberties with my sister's name,' added the young man, in a slight tone of displeasure.

'Pardon me, for the honesty of my purpose toward thee and her. I did but practice with his own weapons, the better to foil him.'

'I see thy intention, Casipeti, and thank thee. This signet will be of use to us.'

'I have thought so. Its possession is the key to the palace.'

'Such was my thought, when you placed it in my hand. Take it, Casipeti, and use it as the night's events shall dictate.'

I have brought it hither to give to thee, as thou art our chosen leader, and should hold the power this gives thee.'

'Casipeti!' cried Montezuma, so suddenly as to cause his companion to start.

'I pray thee, what?'

'A thought has struck me. Hast ever seen this Casipeti of the palace?'

'Often — but not to speak.'

'Thou shouldst resemble him, to deceive the prince?'

'I do think so in height, and manner something. I once, in sport, tried on his captan, left at his tailor's near my shop, and it fitted me bravely.'

'Canst thou find, then, an entire suit of such garments as is worn by that officer?'

'I can, I think.'

'Then thou wilt serve our cause best by at once getting admittance to the palace with this signet, under such guise. There, in the best way thou canst, bring all the servitors over to our side. Methinks, were I a half hour within the palace under a safe disguise, I could get possession of it without striking a blow. This I desire to do, if possible. Go and see what thou canst do, and if in thy power play the maschal till the signal blaze.'

'If I meet the maschal himself?'

'Then trust to the gods and thy own wit. This signet was not given thee to no purpose. 'T is the key of the palace, and I intrust it to you. Haste, good Casipeti. If thou dost corrupt enough of the palace slaves to answer thy end, send me word.'

'If thou leave thy sister another day beneath thy roof, she is lost. The prince, trusting to me, will rest easy till to-morrow,' said Casipeti, as he left him.

'Another day,' said Montezuma, proudly, 'Fatziza will be beneath protection, — in the grave or above it, — surrounded by a hundred thousand brave patriots, who dictate to emperors and nobles.'

He was about to reënter the dwelling to speak to Fatziza, and was about to remain within, when the shadow of a man darkened the side-walk. He looked hastily up, and beheld a soldier approaching the house from the water, with the faltering step and inquiring air of one who is seeking some particular place to which he is a stranger. Montezuma awaited him, with his hand still upon the latch of the door.

‘Is this the abode of Mahco, the net-maker?’ demanded the soldier.

‘It is. What would you with my father?’ answered the young man, laughingly.

‘Then thou art Montezuma, his son,’ said Elec, quickly. ‘If thou art, I have an order to guide thee to the palace.’

‘To the palace?’ repeated Montezuma, with astonishment.

‘Yes, master. But not to make love to any of the princess’s pretty maids, — ah, oh, ah!’

‘What dost thou mean?’

‘I suppose you do n’t think it much matter to kiss a maiden what is betrothed, and so do n’t mind such trifles. I mind ’um.’

‘Pray, what is your business with me?’ demanded Montezuma, sternly.

‘I have a message to thee from the princess — not from her maid.’

‘What know I of her maid?’

‘Thou hast kissed one o’ them, by my buttons!’

‘Thou art drunk with new wine, fellow. Take care of thy life, if thou proceedest further up the street, unless thou canst cry “tyrant, down!” to those who challenge thee.’

‘Nay, master, I am not drunk,’ said Elec, doggedly; ‘but I am jealous. I will settle this matter with thee another day. Come with me now, for I must hasten back.’

‘Go, then.’

‘But I must take thee with me?’

‘Hath the princess sent for me, sayest thou?’

‘She hath, master.’

‘What proof have I of your truth?’

‘This signet, which I was commanded to show you.’

The young man examined the gem by the light of the moon, and then seemed to deliberate for a few moments. At length, his thoughts were audible.

‘There are nearly three hours to midnight. I will see the end of this. ’Tis strange the princess should send for me. There may be treachery in it. Yet, should it be true, I dare not refuse to obey. Soldier!’ he said, turning towards him abruptly, ‘lead on to the palace. I follow you. But, I warn you against treachery. You yourself will be the first victim.’

‘There is no treachery on my part, master,’ said Elec. ‘If there be treason any where, it be between thee and my sweetheart.’

‘Lead on, to the bridge.’

‘I came by a boat.’

‘Then to the boat. I have little time for delay,’ said Montezuma, imperatively.

The two men were soon seated in the boat, which shot swiftly on its way across the canal in the direction of the palace stairs.

CHAPTER XI.

THE EMPEROR AND HIS DAUGHTER.

THE princess Eylla remained seated thoughtfully at her lattice, long after the prince had left her, with her eyes often turned towards the moonlit waters, with anxious expectation. She had quite forgotten him in the contemplation of her interview with the young man who had so singularly interested her. At length one of her female slaves entered from the ante-room, and said, in a low tone, as she stood at a distance :—

‘The emperor, princess.’

‘My father!’ she involuntarily exclaimed, in the deepest confusion; ‘doth he come in anger, child?’

‘He is now here,’ answered the slave, disappearing; and, at the same instant, the emperor entered alone. The princess hastened towards him and affectionately kissed him on the forehead.

‘Dearest father, I do feel honored with this kind visit. Thy cheek is pale. Art thou ill?’

‘Nay — girl! I am better,’ he said, with a smile, observing her anxiety. ‘I will sit with thee by thy lattice. ’T is long since we have conversed together, with the affairs of government drawing so largely upon the time I would else devote to thy sweet society.’

The princess conducted him to the seat which she had just vacated, and sat beside him, with her hand held in his. She was embarrassed. She felt that this visit was untimely, and had a deeper object in view than mere idle pastime. Her thoughts flew to the Prince, and then to the young citizen, for a solution of it. She could not fix upon any conjecture, and sat silent, and not without alarm, waiting for him to speak. She stole a glance at his face, and saw that, beneath all the paternal kindness his love for her had called up, there dwelt a seriousness that foreboded an interview the character of which she felt she could anticipate, and which she feared to encounter. If possible she determined to divest his mind of any thing touching herself and the prince, which she began to feel convinced weighed upon it, and said in a lively tone :—

‘Father, shall I send for my dancing slaves, and let them entertain thee. They have learned some new and graceful steps since last you saw them.’

‘Nay — daughter. I would rather be alone with thee,’ said the emperor gravely.

‘Wilt thou that I shall sing to thee. I know thou lovest to hear the song, composed by the lord Cuiri, to the evening star. See, it shines with a gentle, smiling beam, as if inviting our adoration.’

‘Another time, another time, daughter. Why choosest thou songs of the lord Cuiri? where are those I did hear thee sing, composed by thy cousin?’

‘I have not sung them of late,’ answered the princess falteringly.

‘Come, then, I will hear a song from thee of the prince’s making. Thou didst once know many.’

‘Indeed, father, I do confess I have forgotten them. I was a child then.’

‘Forgotten them! Didst thou learn them as a child, to forget them as a bride? How is it the Duke Cuiri hath more favor with thee than the Prince Palipan?’ demanded the emperor, something sharply.

'He hath not, father,' answered the princess sincerely.

'Then why dost thou bear his compositions in thy memory, and voluntarily offer to sing them to me, when thou canst ne'er recollect a line of the prince's, when I command thee to sing? How is this of Lord Cuiiri?'

'Indeed, father,' cried the princess with pain, 'I do not hold the Lord Cuiiri in better favor than other nobles of the court. I did but think of his song at the moment, among many others of other knights. It was yonder star, to which it was addressed that brought it to mind.'

'So thou canst remember songs of Cuiiri and other knights, but, when thou art asked for one of the prince's, who hath written many in thy praise, thou hast lost thy memory;' said the emperor with irony. 'This, methinks, is passing strange, and thou betrothed to him, and now to become his wife! But, doubtless, fashions have changed with virgin princesses, since I wooed the empress, your mother.'

'My dear father!' cried the princess, casting herself at his feet. She tried to speak further, but utterance failed her, and burying her face in her hands, she laid her head upon his knee, and wept passionately, for a few moments, while he gazed down upon her in silence, with a countenance expressive of mingled sorrow and displeasure. At length she lifted her face to his, and said firmly, yet imploringly:—

'Father, if you love me, sacrifice me not. I can never love the prince.'

'I pray thee, child, calm thyself!' he said, taking her hands kindly.

'Save me, father!' she cried, still kneeling.

'Nay, rise up, my daughter. Let me talk with thee?'

'Not of *him*—no—no!'

'I command thee, rise up and listen to me,' said the emperor, in displeasure. 'I love thee, and will do thee no wrong. I would talk with thee on this subject, which seems, all at once, so hateful!'

'No, not all at once; I have *never* loved the prince.'

'Yet thou hast endured him, and wert passive, at the least. Wherefore, then, all at once, this bitterness against him?'

'I have no bitterness towards the prince, father. I do honor him as my cousin.'

'This is folly. What hath occurred to-day between you? What hath he done, to make thee of thy present mood? What hath changed thee?' he interrogated.

'I cannot love him, father,' answered the perplexed and distressed princess, earnestly; for she could scarcely answer to herself the question.

'Dost thou love me?' he asked, in a tone of sudden tenderness.

'Indeed, I do, dear father.'

'Then, if thou canst not love him, and dost truly love me, as thou sayest, love him for the love you bear to me.'

'Father, I implore thee, do not make me miserable! I can never love the prince.'

'Be it so. Keep thy heart, and let him have thy hand. He will be content with even that, such is his love for thee.'

'He would be content without me altogether, sir, could he but get the throne,' answered the princess, with spirit.

'How mean you, child?'

'That the prince regards me but as the step which he must press beneath his foot, ere he can ascend to thy seat.'

'Thou dost judge thy cousin falsely, daughter! Some prejudice hath

been placed in thy mind against him, and thou wouldst believe him guilty of every wrong!' said the emperor, with angry feelings. 'Thou knowest my heart is set on thy union with thy cousin. The stability and preservation of the empire demand it. There is a prophecy, that when a female shall become heir to the Aztec throne, the sceptre shall pass into the hands of a slave.'

'Is there such a prophecy, father?' asked the princess, with surprise.

'It hath hung over our house for centuries;' answered the emperor, solemnly. 'Thou art the first woman of our race on whom the crown hath descended. It becomes me, therefore, to save the kingdom by the ——'

'Sacrifice of thy child,' she said with feeling. 'Father, 't is an idle tale! I love my country, but I love it too well to give its destiny into the hands of my cousin.'

'Daughter, will not thy love for me lead thee to obey me?' he asked, with affectionate entreaty.

'My dearest father,' she answered, fervently, while the tears flowed fast; 'the gods know how much I love thee! Night and morning my prayers ascend with the smoke of the sacrifice, for blessings on thee. I willingly will lay down my life for you. Give the throne to thy nephew, if thou wilt, and offer me up a sacrifice on the altar of our deity, and I cheerfully yield myself the victim. But ask me not to wed prince Palipan.'

The emperor listened to this eloquent and painfully-thrilling appeal, and seemed to be deeply moved, while he wondered at the unconquerable aversion to the prince, which had suddenly taken possession of her soul. He saw that she was too firm in her purpose to be pressed further upon the subject now, and too full of feeling upon it to render it safe. He looked upon her a few moments in silence, while she kneeled before him, awaiting his decision, with a drooping head, flushed cheek, and tumultuous heaving of the heart, as if prepared to hear from his lips the sentence of the doom she had chosen. At length he bent over her, extended his arms, and lifted her to his heart.

'My dear Eylla,' he said, in the tenderest accents of sympathy, 'I will not vex thy wounded spirit longer with this hateful theme. I could wish thy cousin dead, ere the mention of his name had given thee such sorrow. Kiss me.'

The maiden, who had been waiting for a burst of wrath from a displeased parent and angered monarch, was wholly overcome at this unexpected kindness, and fell, weeping, upon his neck.

'My own dear father, how can I repay this forbearance?'

'Ask thy own heart, my child,' he answered, in a low voice of tender reproof.

'Let me be a few days, sir — I know not what may transpire — it may be — that — that —' and tears checked her utterance.

'I will speak to thee no more of it,' said the emperor, with a smile of success. 'I do leave all my heart's wish to thy filial love. Thou mayest sing to me now — that song of the lord Cui?'

'Indeed, father, I cannot sing.'

'Then go to bed, love. I will leave thee to repose.'

The emperor rose to go, when she caught his hand, and said, earnestly and solemnly: —

'Father, I feel thou dost hope too much. If any thing could win me, it would be the kindness I have this evening experienced. I have only bid thee wait, but not to hope.'

'I shall both wait and *hope*, sweet daughter,' he said, playfully. 'But,' he added, confident that her love for him would overcome her dislike for the prince; 'I do promise thee I will never mention thy cousin's name to thee again.'

With these words the emperor bade her good night, and quitted her apartment. As he returned to his own chamber, it was with confidence in the good sense and filial obedience of his daughter, and through these, of the ultimate success of his hopes. His knowledge of the avenues to Eylla's heart had led him to suppress his displeasure and indulge her when he deemed the severest censure and punishment were due. And he reëntered his apartments, assured that a few days' reflection, on the part of both the prince and the princess, would bring them to regard each other with more favor than ever, and ultimately, by their union, realize the long-cherished hopes he had formed for their happiness and the prosperity of the empire.

Eylla had scarcely time to collect her thoughts or compose her sad features, after the departure of her father, ere Tzitzis entered. Without a word, she stole softly to the feet of her mistress.

'Well, Tzitzis?' asked the princess, eagerly.

'He is without.'

'Whom didst thou send for him?'

'Elec.'

'Thy lover?'

The Peruvian colored, drummed on the floor with one of her pretty feet, and was silent.

'What said he, when bidden?' asked the princess.

'I asked not what he said to Elec; but when I received him at the court-stairs, I asked him if he knew who had sent for him to come to the palace?'

'And what answer made he?' demanded the princess, with quickness.

'He had come by the command of the fair princess, Eylla!'

'Said he *fair*?'

'He did, and much more words of praise of thee than it becometh me to repeat, or thee to hear. But I asked him, if the emperor had sent for him, if he would have come?'

'Thou wert forward? What answered he?'

'With much spirit, that he feared not to obey the emperor's commands, and so did speak some other words I would not the emperor had heard for any thing.'

'Go, bring him hither. I would speak with him at once.'

The Peruvian left the room, and the princess, who had seated herself upon a divan, arranged her robes in a more graceful manner, and with a palpitating heart, and an air of mingled majesty and condescension, prepared to receive the young man. The next moment the slave ushered him into her presence.

CHAPTER XII

THE SERF AND PRINCESS.

AFTER Montezuma had entered the palace, he began to suspect treachery might be concealed beneath all this form of a message from the princess; and the light question put to him by the Peruvian, as to the supposition of

having been sent for by the emperor, strengthened this idea. The part he had taken in the fray occurred to him then for the first time, so much had the thought of the princess filled his mind, and before he entered the wing occupied by her, he fully believed he was about to be led before the emperor. He made up his mind, therefore, to act with fearlessness, and to let his courage and self-possession retrieve his error in putting himself, the leader of the revolt, at such a crisis, in the power of his foe. As he entered the apartment of the princess, therefore, his port was haughty, and his eye flashed round defiance, as it seemed to seek out the person of the emperor but seeing instead the lovely form of the princess before him, his whole bearing changed. The eye lost its fire and assumed a softer light; the lip its curl of haughty defiance, and his whole stern aspect and lofty port were converted into an air of devotion and gentleness; and he knelt reverently before her. The princess marked the instantaneous change, and a blush of gratified pleasure added to her loveliness. For a moment both were silent, — he, awed, as it were, with her wondrous beauty, and with the dignity of her presence, — she, bewildered with her own feelings. At length she summoned calmness, and said, in as cold a tone as she could assume, though her voice trembled,

‘Thou art called Montezuma, the son of Mahco, the net-maker.

‘I am the low-born slave thou hast named, lovely Princess Eylla,’ he answered, with bitterness.

The princess marked his manner, and instinctively interpreted the feeling from which it sprung.

‘Methinks,’ she continued, in a voice that she meant should partake of indifference in its tones, ‘methinks thou wert the cause of certain tumults in the streets to-day.’

‘Noble princess,’ said Montezuma, lifting his face to hers, and addressing her in a firm and respectful tone, but in which she detected something of sadness, ‘inasmuch as *you* judge me to have done wrong, I do confess my error.’

‘Nay — but didst thou not do wrong?’ she said, gazing with admiration upon his fine, manly countenance, and again experiencing the same thrilling emotions in her bosom that the first sight of him from the chariot had caused.

‘Pardon me, Princess Eylla,’ he answered, firmly; ‘but neither I nor they who died to protect my poor life have done wrong against the tyrant.’

‘Tyrant!’ she cried, starting nearly to her feet.

‘Forgive me, princess. I had forgotten, looking on thy gentle face, thou wert his daughter. But if I offend thee,’ he added, with tenderness, ‘thou hast only to order me to the block. Death from thy hands were far better than life with thy father’s foot upon my neck.’

‘You are over-hasty, Montezuma,’ said the princess, with a slight reproof. ‘I would ask of thee how, so young and of thy degree, thou hast now gained such influence over the hearts of men as I have this day witnessed? Who would die thus for the emperor? None.’

‘The emperor, when he needs men’s lives, takes them. Many men have died for the tyrant Ulyd; but not of their own will.’

‘Ha! this to the daughter?’

‘It should have been said to the sire.’

‘Thy spirit is too quick. It becomes not thy station. If my father has injured thee, let me atone,’ she said, in a touching tone of voice. ‘What can I do for thee? I can and do sympathize with thee.’

'Nay, speak not to me so gently, — I cannot bear it,' said the young man, with emotion.

The princess was moved, and looked on him with the deepest interest, as he buried his face in his hands, for the moment wholly overcome by the few kind words of sympathy she had uttered. The whole plan of conspiracy against her rushed like an overwhelming flood upon his mind. Suddenly he fell at her feet and cried,

'Your gentle sympathy, noble princess, has saved your father's empire, — perhaps his life.'

'Speak quickly — what mean you?' she cried, with the intensest alarm.

'I will confess all to thee, and avert the calamity, if possible, and then die, happy in the consciousness of not having struck the blow that would have made you wretched.'

'Speak, I implore thee!'

Montezuma glanced at the Peruvian, who remained near the door.

'Tzitzis, wait in the anteroom!' commanded the princess; and the next moment she was left alone with the young conspirator. Montezuma was for a few minutes silent, and paced the room several times, as if forgetful of her presence. At length he stopped before her and said:

'Gentle Princess Eylla, your image has ever been present to me in this matter, and bidding me spare the empire for thy sake. I had well nigh listened to it, and lived on a slave. To-night you have conquered. It may be too late to avert the blow, but I shall feel happy in having confessed to you my part in it.'

'I do pray you to speak, and let me learn the worst,' she intreated.

'Listen, princess, and forgive, for we have borne much from thy house. Thou knowest the wrongs, — yet do the twentieth part of them come not to thy ears, — that we endure from the nobles, and, pardon me, from the emperor.'

'I do; and my heart hath bled for the innocent.'

'There is not a Mexitilian slave of thy empire, that knows not thy sympathy. But, even thy gentleness could little avail us. We have endured until endurance is no longer a virtue, even in bondmen.'

'What new oppression hath fallen upon thee?'

'None other than is common to our condition, and to each passing day. I have long felt keenly the degradation of my race. Thou knowest, noble princess, that we once were a free and happy people; that we are now slaves to conquerors, and these are your father's house.'

'I know all this; but methinks this government should be regarded as thine own — 't is of many centuries standing.'

'Time can never sanction wrong. If your emperors had given us a portion of civil liberty, we should have been content, perhaps, to have endured their rule. But they have kept us in bondage. We hold no rights, not even that of our lives. The insolence of the nobles, and the blood-thirsty tyranny of the emperor, have at length roused the people to resistance.'

'To revolt?'

'At this moment, princess, there are thirty thousand men disciplined and marshalled, under daring leaders, who wait but a signal from me, to rise and overturn the present dynasty.'

'Traitorous slave!' cried the princess. 'Ho! thou shalt die for it! Ho!'

And she was hastening towards the door to give the alarm, and call upon

the palace guards to seize him, when, with gentle firmness, he caught her hand, and restrained her.

'Be angry with me, but hear me,' he said. 'I swear to thee, princess, one word from thee will have power to allay this rebellion,' he said, boldly.

'Name it,' she said, suffering him to detain her.

'It is a promise.'

'Name it!'

'That you will not wed thy cousin, the Prince Palipan, but reign alone.'

'Ha! Is this the promise thou wouldst have, sir rebel?' said the princess, between pleasure and surprise.

'It is. The people, then, will hope to obtain from thy clemency what now they would have at the steel's point. And he loves thee not.'

'Thou art bold, sir.'

'It is thy goodness and my country's fate that makes me so.'

'What wouldst thou have beside my father's head?' she asked, sternly.

'No, I have told thee, lady, the elements of rebellion are in motion. Within two hours, the signal of revolt is to light the summit of the Temple of War, and before dawn half the city on the other side of the canal, with gates, armor, and military towers, will be in our hands.'

'Thou dost both terrify and fill me with resentment. What dost thou here, rebel, in the presence of thy princess? Wilt thou make me the first victim of thy rebellion?' And she stood before him with a proud and kindling eye.

'Nay, princess, I am here by thy command. I have heard thee speak, and thy voice has melted my soul. From the rebel chief, — who, two hours hence, was to shake the throne of the empire with the vast flood I was to let loose against it, — I am thy slave, obedient to thy slightest wish.'

He bent his knee before her, and seemed to await her commands. The princess walked the chamber rapidly, and was for some time silent. She then stopped and spoke. Her anger was gone, and grief, rather than displeasure, marked the intonations of her voice.

'I know, young man, thou and thy race have borne much. I have trembled at the contemplation of this very result. I had a prophetic intimation, that one day the injustice of the nobles and — and — I will be frank — and of my poor, misguided father, would fall back upon their own heads. This hour has now come. You are the instrument chosen by the gods to guide the event. I should be false to my own feelings, — to my own heart, — did I say I could do less than admire the noble spirit that burns in your bosom. I should feel like you were I in your condition. Though born a princess, I can feel with my subjects. But,' — and now her voice became firm and solemn, — 'this evil must be stayed. 'Tis not too late. Thou wilt, oh! thou wilt avert the destiny that hangs over my father's head!'

She clasped her hands together and implored him, with the silent eloquence of her tearful eyes. Montezuma was deeply affected. He pressed the princess's hand to his lips, and said fervently,

'I do call the gods to witness that, if in the power of mortal man to stay this revolt, it shall be done. I did purpose this, from the moment the sympathy of thy tone fell upon my heart. But, noble and dear princess, the people are in arms for privileges. My voice alone will not stay them. Let me bear to them the promise that what they seek they shall have. the day you ascend the throne.'

'What do they ask?'

'Liberty of lives and property. To be freemen, and not slaves.'

'How can I rule a nation of freemen?'

'By justice, gentleness, and mercy.'

'I do promise. Fly, and save the empire! Oh!' she cried, with eloquent distress, 'avert this stroke, and I will bless thee!'

'It may be too late to suppress the revolt in every quarter, but I will try, or lose my life in the attempt.'

'Nay, — I beseech you, risk not your own life rashly,' she cried, earnestly.

'Dost thou care, then, princess, for the life of one so humble as I?' he asked, deeply moved.

'Thou art no longer humble. Thou art a leader of a nation seeking its freedom. The gods have ennobled thee.' And the eye and manner of the princess bore testimony to the existence of the feeling in her breast, to which she gave utterance.

'Alas! alas! what wrong have I been wilfully plotting against you?' he said, bitterly. 'Oh, that I had met thee yesterday — had but known that so bright and glorious a spirit dwelt beside the throne of a tyrant. I do feel I have been warring against heaven.'

'Tis not too late to retrieve thy error, noble youth!' said the princess, unconsciously laying her hand upon his arm under the influence of the tender and pleased emotions his impassioned words had awakened. 'I will at once send news to the emperor of this fearful storm ready to burst upon his head, and have him march troops at once to all parts that are immediately menaced. This will intimidate the insurgents, and perhaps prevent the revolt. What sayest thou?'

Montezuma turned away and walked across the apartment, and stood by the window, in deep and anxious thought. Conflicting feelings struggled for the mastery in his bosom. At one instant, his country's degradation held the upper place in his mind; the next, the beauty, gentleness and sympathy of the princess, governed him. He felt that this moment was the crisis of his life. It was either his country or the princess. There was no medium. He balanced his honor against his — love. Yes! the heart of Montezuma, of the serf and bondman! of the net-maker's son, was enslaved by the charms of the princess. He felt it, but dared not confess it to himself. But he felt that for her he was ready to make any sacrifice. 'Shall I sacrifice my country?' was the naked question his honor put to him. 'No,' was the faltering response. 'Shall I sacrifice the princess?' 'Never!' came strongly from the depth of his heart. He stood a moment like a statue, with his eyes fixed upon the floor, and her suggestion remained unanswered. 'Shall I be a traitor to my friends and country?' His conscience thundered in his ears, 'shall I be branded with infamy for my daring ambition, in presuming to lift my thoughts to the princess? Am I mad? Let me remember that I am Montezuma, the net-maker — a serf — a slave — a low-born bondman! What have I to do to let a princess, who would scorn and laugh at my feelings, did she know them, weigh against the love of the thousand hearts that are now beating with warm affection for me! Shall I be false for a phantom? Shall I be a traitor, because yonder fair star smiles upon me? Shall I dare woo it? Fool, fool! 'Tis a temptation of the evil spirit! I will be true to my country, and strike the first blow for her liberty.'

'Montezuma!' spoke a sweet reproving voice near him, and he felt a soft hand gently placed within his own.

The blood rushed from his heart, and the strong man trembled like a leaf. He buried his face in the drapery of the window, and his chest heaved strongly and violently. That single word, like the charm of some skillful sorceress, had revolutionized his whole feelings. The princess had read rightly his thoughts, and she had obeyed the impulse of feelings she could not herself control, in approaching him. Her heart, she felt, had become his; and she felt that it was in vain longer to attempt to disguise from herself its condition. She knew, too, with all a woman's skill in reading the heart of man, that the youth loved her. She knew that love, the deepest and most worshipping, unknown to himself, governed every motion, every movement of his eye, every expression of his countenance. She therefore obeyed unhesitatingly the promptings of her own heart — for love knows no reasoning but its own impulses.

'Montezuma,' she repeated a second time, in tones that went to his heart. They were irresistible.

He fell down at her feet and cried, with the strongest emotion,

'Princess, I can but confess my daring passion, and prepare my mind for death.'

'Thou art forgiven, Montezuma,' she said, in a voice that made his heart leap with life. He lifted his bowed head and she met his glance of wondering delight, with a smile that told him he was loved.

'Do I dream? or hath my mad ambition turned my brain?' he said, pressing to his lips the hand she resigned to him.

'Nay, fair youth,' she said smiling, 'if thou dost know not whether thou art sleeping or waking — 'T were best —'

'Pardon me — forgive me — this bliss is too exquisite to be real.'

'Montezuma,' she said, with a sweet dignity that became her. 'I discovered thy love, closely, as you sought to hide it from yourself, beneath reverence and duty — but I had not detected it unless I had first felt a kindred interest in you.'

'In me, lady?'

'To-day,' she continued, with ingenuous frankness, 'when I beheld thee in the conflict, in the street. Thy manly resistance to oppression, and thy proud spirit, kindled my own, which scarcely less than thine, spurns wrong and tyranny. I met thy grateful glance for my intercession, and, brave Montezuma, I felt from that moment, Heaven had formed us for each other.' 'Sweet Princess Eylla,' said Montezuma, with modest dignity. 'I am unworthy.'

'Nay — thou art worthy,' she said, proudly and touchingly, 'or the emperor's daughter would not have felt an interest in thee. When I look upon thee,' she said, surveying his noble person, 'and remember thy courage and spirit, I do feel that it is not the princess that hath stooped to thy rank, but that the gods have elevated thee to hers. From this moment, let there be confidence between us. Those whose hearts are united by the will of the gods, should be but one in feeling. Whatever we may appear to each other in outward bearing before the world, Montezuma, from this moment we ourselves know no inequality. Forget thy birth and condition, for from this hour, my love ennobles thee.'

Montezuma listened to the spirited address of the lovely princess, and caught the spirit of her independent mind. Well worthy had nature made him, in face and form, to win a princess's regard, and richly had she filled the noble casket with the jewels of all that is bright and elevated in the human

character. No sooner did Montezuma find that his love,—for such it was he now felt, that had from the first inflamed his regard for the princess,—was so singularly reciprocated, than his soul,—like the young eagle, which, nurtured by a water-fowl, all at once feeling his power and strength, suddenly expands his pinions and soars to his native skies, to burnish his wings in the sun,—rose with the first feeling of its original powers, to the native dignity of its true station. He was changed by her love, as if a spell had passed over his spirit. He rose freely to her regal height, and stood beside her—her equal. He forgot that he was a slave—he only remembered that her love had made him a prince. She saw the instant change that followed her words, and felt that *she* had not indeed descended from her station, but had placed her love on one most worthy to receive it.

‘Princess,’ he said, with a tone and manner singularly becoming the moral elevation to which love had raised him, while the deepest and most reverential love beamed in his eyes, ‘I knew not what bliss was in store for me. From this moment, my heart and life are yours. It shall be my study to make myself worthy of your regard. From this hour, I do identify myself with thy truest happiness—and should death tomorrow be the penalty of my ambitious love, I shall welcome it with joy, with the recollection that I have been loved by thee.’

‘Nay, Montezuma,’ said the princess with tenderness, ‘there will, I trust, be a better crowning to our love than death. Save to thyself and me, ’tis secret and sacred. It should be thus, until the hour arrive when I shall call thee to my side. Let us in the meanwhile be happy in our mutual regard. From this hour I live only for thee! Thou hast won a true woman’s heart,’ she said, smiling upon him, ‘and thou wilt find love makes even a maiden bold, where her heart is given.’

Montezuma, encouraged by her smile, and emboldened by his accepted love, pressed her unresistingly to his manly heart. For a moment both were silent under the weight of the feelings that naturally rushed upon their minds at such a moment. For an instant the princess’ head dropped upon his shoulder, and tears of feeling started to her eyes. The thought that her woman’s heart had found a refuge from the persecuting love of the prince, nearly overcame her. The lover pressed a light kiss upon her pure forehead, and truly felt himself above all men favored of the gods. Here was indeed a singular and most extraordinary spectacle to human eyes—a princess and a peasant, vowing to each other, love unchanging, love undying, love eternal! Here were two noble and congenial spirits that nature and fortune had sundered widely, brought together by the magical power of love. Well hath Maria del Occidente sung—

‘Nature never formed a soul
Without its own peculiar mate.’

The princess was the first to speak.

‘We have forgotten, in ourselves, noble Montezuma, the dark cloud ready to burst upon the empire,’ she said, releasing herself blushing from the support of his arm, and speaking with the spirit that became the startling theme.

‘It shall be stayed,’ he said resolutely.

‘How?’ she demanded eagerly.

‘By my own influence, and the use of thy name.’

‘Dost thou mean my promise to grant them all they desire?’

'I fear nothing else will save the empire,' he said, decidedly.

'Use it, then. Go! Shall not the emperor be told that he may strengthen the threatened posts?'

'It were best not. The troops, once in motion, would not rest until their thirsty swords were slaked in blood. Leave it to me, dearest Princess Eylla, nor be alarmed at any signal lights or uproar you may hear in the city. Some lives will doubtless have to be sacrificed, but it shall be quelled.'

'I do fear they will hold thee as a traitor, with the first word you utter, and sacrifice you to their vengeance,' she said, with anxious alarm.

'Fear not, dearest princess. I know the temper of my countrymen well. I pray thee be at peace, and trust all to me,' he said, preparing to go.

'The gods aid thee! I will indeed redress their wrongs when I have the throne! Oh that I could speak to them in person. My presence — my voice! it might allay the upheaving of this human sea!'

'Nay — believe me, princess, thy name alone shall appease it. Farewell.'

'Come hither, if thy life is spared, as soon as you can assure me the empire is safe. Alas, what evil hath my father's severe rule brought upon his own head! Take this signet. It will secure your readmission to the palace. Fly, now, ere it be already too late. 'T is within an hour of midnight. Oh that Heaven would return thee safely. My place will be at yonder altar, till thou come back and tell me the throne of my father's house is saved. Tzitzis!'

The Peruvian entered and knelt before her mistress.

'Rise, and reconduct this youth to the water. See thou address him not; and hasten thy return.'

Montezuma respectfully pressed to his lips the hand the princess extended towards him, and instantly left the apartment with his guide. The princess flew to a little altar near the window, and cast herself on her knees before it, and for sometime, gave indulgence to the rush of strange and new thoughts that agitated her bosom, rather than to devotion. How much had transpired since she knelt before that altar in the morning! How wonderful the revolution in her feelings. How sudden, bold, and effectual, had been Love's victory. A glance, interchanged with a peasant, had kindled admiration into tender interest. A few moments' interview had ripened interest into love, and her heart was no longer her own! How wonderful the power and dominion of love! No rank is too high for his daring aim; no degree too low, to which he will not stoop to launch his arrow.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TWO CASIPETIS.

ONLY a few minutes had elapsed after Montezuma had been taken in charge, on his first arrival at the palace with Elec, by the fair Peruvian slave, ere another boat appeared at the palace stairs. A single individual, richly dressed in some official costume, with his face carelessly half-concealed in his short cloak, leaped on shore, and, ascending the steps, crossed the

moonlit court, to a gate, at the extremity, which led into the body of the palace. A sentinel was at the gate, who merely said as he passed by,

'Ah, master steward! Thou art abroad late.'

'I have great business on my hands, friend,' answered the officer; mine is a weighty occupation.'

'It is, if I may judge by thyself. Methinks thou dost gain a pound of fat a day.'

'And thou dost lose a pound. This standing by the hour on cold stones, locked up in steel, is, methinks, no pastime. How, then, say you, the nobles would like it?'

'The nobles have no need. I am but a poor man-at-arms, and like must like with me.'

'Art thou an Aztec by birth?'

'Ah, mascal, thou art merry. Am I a noble, forsooth?'

'Wouldst thou change places with one?'

'Aye, that would I.'

'Who bade thee stand here from morning till night, cased in armor?'

'The captain, surely.'

'Who bade the captain hold the guard here?'

'His noble.'

'Who gave the noble his power?'

'The emperor.'

'And whence had the emperor his?'

'From the gods.'

'Thou dost lie, there, Huri,' boldly spoke a soldier, from a recess near him. He got it by conquest, and has held it by tyranny.'

The stranger started with an exclamation of surprise and pleasure.

'It were well the emperor got not wind of thy speech, Baqueti,' said the soldier. 'Ever since one of his guard took up on his spear-point thy little boy, because his shout had started his horse, thou hast been growling. Thou wilt have a spear thrust through thy tongue, yet.'

'Soldier, give me thine hand,' said the stranger, approaching; 'I and thou are of one mind. When thou seest a flame rising on yonder hill of the temple, know that the days of the tyrant are ended.'

'Who art thou?' asked the soldier, drawing him aside to the moonlight.

'Thou art not Casipeti, the mascal.'

'No. I am Casipeti, the slave.'

'I have heard of thee. Thou wert in my thoughts that moment you came up. What dost thou here?'

Casipeti saw he was to be fully trusted, and in a few words explained to him the conspiracy. 'Now,' said he to him, 'I leave you to persuade your comrade, and such of the guard as hold this gate, to join us.'

'I pledge my life to the cause,' answered the man firmly. 'Whither go you now?'

'Into the palace, to feel the pulses of all its inmates that I fall in with.'

'Thou wilt find many that throb rightly,' said the soldier, as Casipeti passed on and entered upon the inner terrace of the palace.

He passed leisurely along the corridor, not forgetful of his assumed character, towards the battlement, where Tzitzis had met Elec. Ere he reached the winding steps, he was accosted by two or three servitors passing to and fro, and once or twice, from his ignorance of the affairs upon which they addressed him, he was in danger of betraying his true character. At length

he reached the platform of the tower, where the sentinel was stationed. It was Elec himself, who had but a short time before relieved the post. A group of soldiers were near him.

'Bless me!' said one, 'if here is not the mascal climbing the stairs for the first time in a twelvemonth.'

'Hast thou come up to shoot skylarks for the princess's dinner?' asked another, laughingly.

'Elec, he hath seen thy sweetheart here an hour since, and hath come up to make love to her,' added a third.

Casipeti, an' thou hast come up hither for that, I will hold a quarrel with thee,' answered Elec, stoutly. 'No man hath aught to say to her, but I have something to say to him.'

'Nay, good youth. I did come here but to hold a moment's discourse with thee and breathe the cool air, ere I went to bed for the night. A good bed for thee were better than a long night-watch. Nevertheless, I would I wore a soldier's sword for one good hour.'

'Wherefore, stout mascal? wherefore?' asked several, in tones of rail-lery, crowding around him as he stood, his features indistinctly seen in the shadow of the battlement that towered above their heads.

'Wherefore?' repeated the disguised waterman, stoutly; 'that I might lay it down at the emperor's feet and say, — take that thou gavest me not.'

'He would be sure give it thee in thy body, an' thou didst,' answered Elec.

'How is it he gave it to thee not?' asked one of the soldiers.

'How can a man give that which is not his to give?'

'But,' said one of the soldiers, 'the sword is the emperor's, with which he arms you — the power is his — you are his. Methinks you are in a fair way of cutting your own weasand with your sword.'

'These are dangerous words?' said another.

'Dangerous words!' echoed Elec; 'shall I put him under arrest, comrades, for speaking such words against the emperor?'

'Nay' said the first soldier. 'The mascal hath taken wine, and come up here to cool himself. I advise thee, Casipeti, if thou keep thy mouth open the while, keep thy tongue still. These are words that it will do to talk to the thoughts, and not to the winds, to be borne on their wings to the ears of our masters.'

'What is thy name?' asked Casipeti of this man, eagerly, and speaking in a tone only to be heard by him he addressed.

'Hast thou forgotten Thenul?'

'Then thou art he I seek. Dost thou know a fellow-soldier called Baqueti?'

'Well.'

'Dost thou know well the mascal?'

'I could not paint thy face on canvass, sir steward, but I have seen it oft. Let me look at thee again, and I will know thee better, if thou desirest it.'

'Look at me well,' said Casipeti, advancing a step into the light of the moon, where it shone down upon the battlement between two turrets. He then threw back his cape, and looked the soldier steadily in the eye.

'By the beard of Hapu! thou art not the mascal?'

'No — hist! I am a friend of Baqueti. He bade me say this to thee. Dost thou understand me?'

'I do. But what is the fruit of this?'

‘It matters not, if he and I and you have been wronged by the tyrant. We shall be wronged again; and wherefore should we grieve? We are slaves, and must endure. ’Tis dangerous to speak of this, and Baqueti hath been foolish to make the noise he hath done. He will lose his head.’

‘There is redress for thee and him and me,’ answered Casipeti, impressively.

‘Who, then, art thou?’ demanded the man, starting at the depth and earnestness of his voice.

‘I am Casipeti, the waterman.’

‘The same who struck the noble?’

‘I am.’

‘Thou art not safe here,’ cried the soldier, with anxiety for his safety.

‘I venture my life here for my country’s good. Listen to me, for I see thy soul is rightly prepared for what I would pour into it.’

With these words, he led him further from the group of soldiers, and opened to him, as he had done to Baqueti, the whole conspiracy. Thenul listened to the spirited relation, and when he had ended, embraced him.

‘Learn, brave Casipeti,’ he said, impressively, ‘that my spirit, I know not how, hath had some intimation that liberty would yet visit us. It may have been the spirit of my twin-brother, who was wantonly slain by a displeased knight, that hath whispered it.’

‘Wilt thou be answerable for this post,’ asked Casipeti, ‘that it shall give admittance to such as Montezuma shall appoint to take possession of the palace?’

‘It shall be on our side to a soldier. They need but little to bring them to turn their swords against the throne. Alas! the princess Eylla.’

‘Alas! the sweet princess, indeed,’ echoed Casipeti. ‘If she were alone upon the throne, she would grant her people liberty. Not a sword would be drawn against her. But there stand two between her, — the emperor, and the scarcely less tyrant, Prince Palipan.’

Thus speaking, Casipeti, feeling sure that two of the gates of the palace, and its principal entrances from the water-side, would be held by friends, to give the insurgents admittance, left the soldier, and assuming the gait and air of the steward, proceeded towards the interior of the palace by the vaulted corridor, through which the lovely Peruvian slave had come to deliver the message of the princess to her lover. At the opposite extremity he beheld the courtiers Tzitzis had seen, still lounging in the central portico, through which it was necessary for him to pass to reach the head-quarters of the palace-guard beyond, one or two of the soldiers composing which were known to him. Covering more of his face with the ruff of his silken cloak, and pressing forward with the busy pace of one not wishing to be interrupted, he had got near the end of the gallery, when Sulukis, the jester, beholding him, hastened to meet him.

‘Ah, good Casipeti, I am glad to see thee! The knights yonder will none o’ my company, and ha’ bid me go seek fools to talk with. The gods ha’ sent thee to their bidding.’

‘Nay, good sir fool, I am in haste.’

‘Thou shouldst never be in a hurry, gossip,’ said Sulukis, taking him by the cloak. ‘If thou art fat, — as thou art, — it maketh thee lean; if thou art lean, it but worketh the bones through the skin. It is bad before dinner, in that it taketh in wind upon the stomach; it is bad after dinner, in that it hindereth digestion. ’Tis bad of a morning, because one should never

begin the day in a hurry, lest he hurry through it; it is bad at night, as now, because —

‘I do pray thee, let me pass, good friend; I have business of moment,’ said Casipeti, anxiously.

‘Therein again thou showest thy folly. Thou shouldst have no business left undone at this hour. If ’t is business of moment, it should ha’ been done earlier, and by neglect of it thou hast forfeited thy stewardship, and I will apply for it. If —’

‘Do not detain me, fool!’ said Casipeti, sternly, thrusting him aside, and endeavoring to pass on.

But Sulukis was too securely fastened to the waterman’s cloak to be shaken off.

‘How! gossip Casipeti! dost thou treat the emperor’s friend and council thus? If thou hadst not lost thy wits thou wouldst keep friends with him who hath the emperor’s ear,’ said Sulukis, importantly. ‘Two words in it, and I’d hang thee. Say thou didst evil in thrusting me aside. Did not yonder knights bid me come and talk with thee?’

‘If thou wilt talk, then come with me,’ said Casipeti, desirous to get beyond the portico, into which the gallery led, trusting that in crossing it he should get rid of his annoyer in the crowd.

‘Art thou going to give orders to the butler about the emperor’s wine, to-morrow?’

‘Yes, yes!’

‘Then I am with you, gossip,’ said the fool, delightedly. And thus saying he passed his arm familiarly through Casipeti’s, and walked along with him.

The waterman hastened as they came among the courtiers, and strove, by keeping behind the columns, to avoid their notice. But Sulukis had no such motive in view, and as he came among them cried,

‘Gramercy! gentle knights! I ha’ caught a fool, an’ he hath turned out a wise man.’

‘How so, good fool?’ asked the very nice and very youthful Count Arispe, whose gallantry had been defeated by the more skillful Peruvian maiden, walking up towards the pair, and gently, the while, fingering his incipient mustache. ‘Resolve that for us.’

‘First, he is a fool, in that I found him making haste, and no wise man doth make haste, for reasons I have but now laid down to him for his future profiting.’

‘And how turned he out a wise man? Have us that?’

‘Not as thou art likely to do, gossip,’ said Sulukis, pertly.

‘How is that, Sulukis?’

‘He said he would nothing with me, nor would he listen a word; and I had to hold him by his cloak to get the point o’ his ear. Therefore hath he proved himself a wise man, by not caring to listen to a fool.’

‘Go to, knave. Thou art more saucy than witless.’

‘And there be knights o’ the court more witless than saucy,’ answered the jester, sharply.

‘By the head of my father! I will lay my sword upon thy shoulders,’ answered the youth, angrily, half unsheathing the weapon.

‘Wouldst know, gentle knight, asked Sulukis, adroitly getting Casipeti between himself and the youth, ‘why he doth swear by the head o’ his father?’

‘Wherefore, fool?’ cried the young nobles about him.

'Because he hath no beard o' his own to swear by.'

Sulukis had no sooner given utterance to this than, to escape the ire of the fiery young man, he let go his hold of Casipeti, and made a leap in the opposite direction, but at the same instant bounded back with a yell of terror and surprise. Before him he had beheld advancing a second Casipeti, in all points the counterpart of the Casipeti he had just sprung from. He stood midway between the two, his head turning with the rapidity of lightning, from one to the other, while he seemed bewildered between ludicrous terror and the most perfect wonder. The waterman, whose situation before this had been sufficiently critical, was not much less surprised, though he had been in a degree prepared for such a *denouement*. The surprise of the surrounding courtiers was great, but the thorough astonishment of the maschal himself, who it was in proper person that chanced to cross the hall at that instant, may not be pictured. He stopped as if converted into a statue, and held up both his hands in speechless amazement. The other Casipeti did precisely the same thing, and betrayed equal amazement. Sulukis, at this, was thrown into an ecstasy of astonishment, and began to caper, first to one and then to the other, bowing and gesticulating in the most extraordinary manner. His little remaining wit seemed to have left him, and he appeared perfectly bewitched. The knights conceived it to be some privately understood masquerade, but were puzzled to distinguish which was the true Casipeti, the maschal. At length the fool found his tongue.

'Two fools, masters! Sulukis hath company! Two fools! Hi, hi! ho, ho! Are you gossip, or are *you* gossip? Was it you going to see the butler, or *you* going to see the butler?' And he turned, as he spoke, from one to the other, alternately, in the most ludicrous manner, while his face expressed mingled humor and fear.

'He is an impostor,' said the maschal, trembling with fear and rage. Thereupon Sulukis ran up and shook his fist in the waterman's face.

'He is an impostor,' repeated the other in the same tone. Sulukis returned and shook his fist in his face, with a menacing look.

'He lies!' cried the maschal, advancing a step.

'He lies!' cried his counterpart, also advancing a step.

'I am the true Casipeti,' said the maschal of the palace.

'I am the true Casipeti,' said the waterman.

'He hath stolen my robe and cloak,' cried Casipeti, the steward, approaching two steps nearer.

'He hath stolen my robe and cloak,' cried Casipeti, the waterman, also approaching two steps.

'What is this?' demanded an old nobleman, approaching; 'a broil within the emperor's hearing! How is this? Is it thou? What art thou here for, sir maschal?'

His eye, as he spoke, rested alone on the waterman, the other being partly hidden by a column and the intervening persons of the amused and puzzled courtiers.

'The gods, having forgot to give Casipeti brains when they made him, have made another, and now neither know which is which,' said the jester. 'Put me to the questioning o' them both, and I'll prove you the new one, and show if the gods ha' bettered their work.'

The noble beheld then the counterpart, and gazed from one to the other, with surprise. 'What is this mummery?' he asked, sternly.

'My Lord,' said Casipeti, the waterman, 'I know not, save that this good

fool and I were walking together across the hall, when we encountered this impostor.'

'Yes, I'll swear to it. We were going to get the emperor's wine,' said Sulukis, decidedly.

'T is false! my Lord Vepotani,' cried the other, with indignation. 'I was coming from my own office to —'

'Listen not to him, my Lord,' said the waterman, in a bold tone. 'I pray you have him punished.'

'He should be hanged!' cried the maschal. 'I will appeal to the emperor.'

'Now, by mine honor, I do not know which of ye is the true man,' said Lord Vepotani, with perplexity.

'Leave me to test it, gossip?' said Sulukis; 'I will show thee which is the ass, an' they be not both asses.'

'It is my opinion, my lord,' said one of the knights, pointing to the waterman, 'that this is Casipeti, the true maschal.'

'Indeed, my Lord,' said the maschal, intreatingly, 'I am the true Casipeti.'

'Friend,' said the waterman, who felt his situation had become by no means safe or pleasant, and who knew that only the most finished address and boldness could release him from it; 'friend,'—and he approached close to his counterpart,—'I know that you think you are the true Casipeti, the maschal of the palace. But indeed you are deceived. You labor under one of those delusions that sometimes afflicts men's minds. Although you have, under this idea, assumed my dress and office, I will let it pass; and, as the injury is only mine, trust these noble knights will overlook it, if you will retire in peace.'

'But I *am* the maschal,' said the steward, faintly, actually beginning to question his own identity, seeing the cool decision and honest assurance of the other.

'I tell thee thou art under an illusion. If thou wilt go — go in peace. My Lord, I beg you will let him go unpunished. I do assure you he will in the morning come to his right mind. It is an unhappy hallucination, by which he mistaketh himself for another.'

The steward appeared perfectly bewildered. He looked down upon his habit, then examined one sleeve of his caftan, and then the other, surveyed his fingers, stroked his beard, and finally, as if perfectly satisfied of his proper identity, shook his head with a decided air.

'My lord, I *am* myself,' he said confidently.

'Wilt thou hang thyself,' said the fool, going up to him. 'Hath not gossip convinced thee thou art a hallucination, which is something between a fool and a wise man?'

'Surely thou dost know me, good Sulukis,' said the maschal, coaxingly.

'Was I going with thee to the butler's just now to get me a cup o' the emperor's wine?'

'No.'

'Then thou art a hallucination. Condemn him, righteous lord Vepotani.'

'By the black eagle! I would not swear but both should be condemned. Who here present knoweth truly Casipeti, the maschal of the palace?'

While the latter part of this scene was passing, Montezuma, on his way from the princess, conducted by Tzitzis, had approached the head of the marble flight of stairs leading down to the hall. He at once detected the true position of affairs, and saw the imminent danger in which his friend and compatriot had involved himself.

'Tzitzis,' he said, pointing beneath to the group, 'I pray thee, do me and yonder man a service. Go down and mingle with the crowd, and if opportunity offer to bear testimony to the true Casipeti, bear it against him thou knowest to be the maschal of the palace, and in favor of the other. Do me this service, and I will not forget thee. I trust to thy wit to get him free from the dilemma in which he seems placed.'

'It will be a falsehood,' she said, hesitating.

'Thou must use deceit to save his life, which else is forfeit.'

Tzitzis obeyed, and the next instant was standing, silent and unobserved, within a few feet of the old noble.

'If any one know the face of the maschal,' repeated he, 'let him decide between the two.'

'I do know Casipeti, the maschal, as well as any one in the palace,' answered Tzitzis readily, presenting herself.

'Wilt thou abide by her decision?' asked the noble of the steward.

'Indeed I will,' said the steward, cheerfully. 'If Tzitzis, whom I have known from a child, cannot judge between me and yonder impostor, I will believe I am under an illusion.'

'What sayest thou, pretty maiden?' asked the nobleman, pointing at the maschal. 'Is that the steward of the palace?'

Tzitzis advanced towards him, and deliberately surveyed him from head to foot, Sulukis precisely imitating her. She then shook her head doubtfully, and approached and took off his green silk bonnet, and looked him long and earnestly in the face. She then replaced the cap, and again shook her head gravely. Sulukis made the same scrutiny of his features, jammed his cap down over his eyes, and also shook his head dubiously, though it was plain, from the peculiar expression about his mouth, that the fool knew well that he was the genuine Casipeti.

'My Lord, it is not Casipeti, the emperor's steward,' she said decidedly, and with a sober air of certainty that was irresistible and convincing, even to those who had thought they had really recognized the steward.

'My lord, there is not a hair o' his eye-brows that is the same color o' the true Casipeti,' said the fool, in his turn.

The wretched maschal clasped his hands together in despair, and seemed ready to fall to the ground; but his anxiety to learn the decision in the other case sustained him.

'Now, Tzitzis, approach this fellow's counterpart, and see if he be the maschal—for neither may be what he professes to be.'

The maiden advanced towards the waterman, who, after the judgment passed on the real official of the palace, began to feel a degree of confidence that enabled him coolly to prepare for the scrutiny. Though the resemblance between the two was sufficiently striking to render it easy, in similar dresses, to mistake one for the other, even by those in the habit of passing the maschal daily, yet when the two came to be compared, there was little trace of the general likeness. The maschal was very portly, with short gray locks and a full gray beard—while his face was exceedingly red, or of a bright ruby color. The waterman, who was similarly built, and broadly shaped about the shoulders, was far less portly, and had light brown hair, but slightly mixed with gray; while his complexion was browned by exposure to the winds and waves.

Tzitzis surveyed him from head to foot, as deliberately as she had done the counterpart to him, and then nodded her head very assuredly. Sulukis

made the same careful survey, and also nodded his head with approbation. She then came up close to him, as he had done to the other, removed his silken cap, and looked closely in his face. She then turned to the nobleman, and said confidently and unhesitatingly,

'This is the maschal, my lord.'

'I will swear to him, cousin Vepotani,' said the jester, stoutly.

'Then let this fellow be seized,' cried the nobleman, sternly.

'My lord, my good lord,' cried the steward, falling on his knees, 'I do beseech thee, mercy.'

'Thou art an impostor. Away with him!'

'Send for my wife,' he added, in despair. 'If she do not know me, then I were better hanged.'

'It were no test, my lord Vepotani,' cried the jester; 'an she be a woman she will swear to him who is not her husband, that she may get a new one. Ne'er trust to a woman in such a matter, gossip.'

'Why art thou lingering here?' said Tzitzis, in an under tone, to the waterman. 'Haste and leave the palace! All are now regarding the steward! Haste!'

The disguised waterman, taking advantage of the diversion she had created in his favor, slipped from the crowd, and following her, she conducted him to where Montezuma stood.

'Art thou here?' exclaimed Casipeti, with surprise.

'Come with me,' said Montezuma quickly and cautiously. 'Lead on, maiden. It were time we left the palace.'

She conducted them by a private passage, to a small postern, opening into the courtyard by the water side, and letting them forth, was closing it, when Montezuma arrested her hand.

'Sweet maiden, I will not forget thy good services to-night. Commend me to thy mistress, and tell her thou hast seen me safely to the portal, and that I go without delay, to obey her commands. I pr'y thee, show me the secret of this postern.'

'I dare not,' she said, laughing. 'T is known only to the princess and myself, and the emperor.'

'I have to return again to the palace to-night,' he continued, in a gently entreating tone.

'Then be it so. If the princess blame me—'

'I will take the censure, and shield thee.'

'Thou hast confidence in her grace, methinks,' she said, archly.

'Thou art too forward, pretty maiden,' he answered, in a similar tone. 'Wilt comply with my wish?'

'I am afraid to — but I will.'

She then showed to him a private slide, that covered a secret bolt shutting into the lintel, and explained to him its use. Then closing the postern upon them, she disappeared within.

'What hast thou done in the palace, Casipeti?' asked Montezuma, as they crossed the paved court in the shadows of a row of lime trees. 'I have much to tell thee.'

'Why art thou here?' demanded Casipeti, in reply.

'Listen, my brave friend,' said Montezuma impressively, stopping beneath a tree that shaded the stairway to the water. 'The Princess Eylla sent for me on account of my affray to-day, and her messenger conducted me secretly to her apartments, and was reconducting me to this spot, when I saw your difficulty with your counterpart, the maschal.'

‘And did you thus, and at such a time, venture yourself in the palace?’ asked Casipeti, with surprise.

‘I did. I anticipated something, I knew not what, would grow out of it, favorable to our cause.’

‘And what is the result?’ asked the conspirator quickly.

‘She received me with that sweet urbanity that hath won all hearts. Then spoke of our oppression by the nobles, and said she grieved at it, and mourned over her father’s cruel and vindictive disposition.’

‘And yet she is ready to betroth herself to a man no less cruel by nature, and whose breast is burning with a thousand imagined wrongs, to revenge upon the people.’

‘Casipeti,’ said Montezuma, solemnly and decidedly, ‘the princess will never wed with her cousin.’

‘No?’ exclaimed the conspirator with surprise and doubt. ‘T is said, indeed, she loves him not. But the emperor hath commanded it. It is as settled as the throne itself.’

‘If it be then by the emperor’s command, and she love him not, good Casipeti, censure her not. But I tell thee that the princess hath said to me, she will never wed the prince.’

‘To thee?’

‘To me, who am unworthy to speak in her presence. Listen, but hold thy feelings. I unfolded to her the whole of our conspiracy.’

‘Betrayed us?’ cried the insurgent leader, with fierce surprise. ‘Traitor!’

‘No, Casipeti,’ answered Montezuma, calmly. ‘The princess spoke of our wrongs, and said she would redress them, when she came to the throne. I reminded her of her husband, the prince, who would then hold the power. Her eye flashed, and she said in the most spirited and decided manner, she would never espouse the prince; that the happiness of her subjects was too dear to her, and she would reign for them. At these words, Casipeti, I remembered what we were contemplating, and filled with remorse, and subdued by her gentle virtues, I cast myself at her feet, and told all.’

‘Go on,’ said Casipeti, who seemed to be struggling with the strongest emotion.

‘She was overwhelmed with grief and terror. She demanded what we wanted. I told her — to be free.’

‘What answered she?’

‘That if I would stay the revolt in its birth, she would grant all we asked.’

‘All?’

‘Every thing that human liberty contends for.’

‘Save her sceptre and her throne, her body-guard of nobles, and her whole imperial power,’ answered Casipeti, with irony.

‘Wouldst thou overthrow the throne, Casipeti? Was it not understood, that the empire should remain in unity, and only the chains that bound us to its wheels, be broken. Thou wouldst not live in anarchy?’

‘No, Montezuma. If the power of the throne could be checked by a balance of power with the people, it might stand. This proposition of the princess should be considered.’

‘There is but little time. It is either revolution and anarchy, or freedom, with a healthy government, Casipeti! I trust to your patriotism and wisdom in this crisis. If I get not your influence on the side I have espoused, I shall deeply grieve, and give up my country as lost: for I shall fear, indeed,

that you love a dangerous power of your own creation, better than the true happiness of your country.'

'Montezuma,' cried Casipeti, embracing him, 'you are right. I am with you in heart and hand. But I fear 't is too late to turn back the tide. 'T is near midnight. Let us hasten and see what can be done. If the gods give us bloodless liberty, then it will be far dearer to us. How shall we proceed?'

'Let us every where proclaim the princess' promise, and be ready to offer ourselves hostages for its performance. We have kindled the elements of conflagration — we must do our best to smother them, ere they burst into a blaze. What have you done in the palace?'

'Obtained many willing ears. I will hasten to the gates and battlements, and but whisper, we are discovered, and bid them keep all quiet. I will then follow you to the other side. I fear there will be more difficulty there than we imagine. Depend upon my faithfulness, and life, if need be — for I am convinced I should sacrifice it as much for my country in seeking to suppress, as if I should lose it in leading on the revolt. Farewell. The gods be with us.'

The two chiefs of the insurrection parted, and the next moment, Montezuma was in a boat on his way to the scene of revolt. It was now within less than an hour of midnight, and all the city seemed to be buried in deep repose. But as he approached the opposite shore at the foot of net-makers' street, he distinctly heard a low deep murmur, like that of bees disturbed in their hives. The waterman hastened towards the gate, to seek, by giving the alarm of the discovery of the conspiracy, to render harmless the seeds of it. he had there scattered.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE OTOL.

As Tzitzis, on her return towards the apartments of the princess, came to the end of the gallery of the postern by which she had conducted Montezuma from the palace, the Tlascalan glided from behind a column of the corridor and confronted her.

'What dost thou want with me, Gueicha?' she said, shrinking with disgust and fear.

'The prince would speak with thee, pretty Peruvian!' he said, in an unpleasant and repulsive tone.

'Is it of moment?' she said, hastening to obey.

'I have but delivered his commands,' said the Tlascalan, gliding away with the noiseless step peculiar to his race, and disappearing in the shadows of the corridor beyond.

'I do tremble at meeting this fierce prince. He perhaps has heard or suspected something of what hath transpired to-night. Or it may be for the hundredth time to ask me of the state of the princess' heart, and why it is she loves him not. Indeed I could not love him.'

While these thoughts were passing through her mind, she was following

the Tlascalan, and soon came to a door of polished ebony leading from the extremity of the corridor to the first of the suite of rooms occupied by the prince. Gueicha was waiting for her upon the step, and as she came near, entered first and held the leaf of the door open for her to pass in.

She found herself suddenly amid a resplendent blaze of lights reflected from panels of silver, that surrounded the ante-chamber. The floor was of ivory, curiously inlaid with ebony, and the arched ceiling overlaid with mother of pearl. On the farther side of the room was an alcove, the sides richly hung with silken tapestry, on which were pictured the conquests of the first Aztec king over the Mexitili. The Tlascalan silently pointed through this alcove into a larger apartment visible beyond, the walls of which were hung with rich armor and banners; while from the centre of the dome blazed a sun of virgin gold, supported by the extended pinions of the black eagle of the House of Aztec. The floor was overlaid with rich rugs to protect the feet of the occupant from the cold, polished marble.

The prince was reclining on a sort of divan of piled cushions, when she entered. He immediately rose as if expecting her, and smiling, advanced a step. But his smile was forced, his face was flushed, and his eye restless and stern. From the moment he had left the emperor, and reached his own room, he had been sternly pacing his apartments, thinking over his reception by the princess, and also his interview with the emperor. Schemes of guilty ambition floated uppermost in his revengeful thoughts. At one moment he burned with the fiercest resentment against the princess, and vowed her death. At another, his love for her overcame this feeling, and he again dwelt upon the union which the emperor had so much at heart. The idea of seizing the throne, and establishing himself upon it by the power he could summon as commander of half the imperial army, at length, after various struggles, got, and seemed likely to maintain, the ascendancy. The beauty, and virtues, and the hereditary rights of the princess, pleaded to his generosity, to his honor, and to his heart; but he had only to remember that she had scorned his love, to make the tottering fabric of his vicious ambition settle more firmly upon its base. The age and paternal kindness of the emperor, and his dearest and long-cherished hopes for the union of the cousins, and, through it, the perpetuity of the empire, also pleaded loudly for a hearing. But he excused his treason by accusing the emperor of wishing to make him emperor only as the tool of his own imperial ambition, and not for any love he entertained for him. At length, he conceived and matured his purpose. It will develop itself.

'No, no,' he cried, casting himself, wearied, upon the divan; 'I will neither be the father's tool, nor corner-stone of the daughter's throne. My haughty cousin shall repent her scorn of my true love. The blood of the Aztec race throbs in my pulse as well as hers. *It shall be done!* By to-morrow's dawn the Aztec blood shall flow alone in *my* veins. Gueicha!'

'Your highness.'

'Thou hast that otol flower?'

'It is in yonder vase, prince.'

'Let it remain. Come hither, closer.'

The slave knelt at his feet, in an attitude of the most servile submission to his will, and his glittering eye burned with the native evil lurking in his heart. He anticipated being the actor in wickedness, and his eyes, as he listened, wore unconsciously the look of a serpent's, as he prepares to uncoil his folds for the deadly spring.

'Gueicha, thou hast hitherto been faithful to me. Hadst thou not been, thou well knowest thou wouldst not be here to hear it. I now need subtilty, secrecy, and wisdom, as well as faithfulness. May I depend on thee?'

The Tlascalan bent his neck to the floor, and passed his hand across the back of it, in token of his willingness to lose his head if he proved otherwise.

'It is well,' said the prince; 'but if thou fail me, sirrah, thy miserable life would not atone for the evil. Know, Gueicha, I have been scorned by the princess,' added the prince, as if accustomed to speak unreservedly to his slave.

The Tlascalan smiled inwardly, and a faint gleam of secret pleasure shone in his eyes. The prince detected it, and said,

'I know thy wicked spirit rejoiceth at this. Thy race are not like others. You alone feel delight in human woe and evil. Look less fiendish, I command thee!' he cried, fiercely, and with a half shudder, as he met a darker expression in his face. 'I loathe thee, villain!'

'What of the princess?' said the unmoved slave, adroitly.

'Thou hast it. She hath refused my hand. She is lost to me forever.'

'Thou dost mean, thou hast lost the throne.'

'Thou art deeper than I took thee to be. *If* I abide by the princess' decision, I *have* lost the throne. But I do not intend to, worthy Gueicha,' he added, in a deep, sardonic tone. 'Dost thou understand me?'

'No, prince.'

'Then thou art duller than an Ottomitish swineherd.'

'Thou wouldst not compel the princess to espouse thee?'

'Compel her? No, no! I would not wed her, slave, did she kneel at my feet as thou now art doing, and implore me to accept her hand and throne. Canst thou not divine my purpose?'

'Wouldst thou harm her?'

'Why dost falter? out with it.'

'Death?' whispered the Tlascalan, fearfully.

'Now thou hast it. *Death!*'

'And the emperor?'

'*DEATH!*' repeated the prince, in a low, stern voice.

'And the empire?'

'Will become mine,' cried the prince, with vindictive animation.

The Tlascalan was for a moment silent, under the weight of this disclosure, and then said, quietly.

'T is well conceived, prince.'

'And shall be well executed. Thou must now know thy part in it. For the emperor, prepare me forthwith a subtle and invisible poison; I will mingle it with his wine. For my fair cousin, I have a less rude death.' And the prince cast his glance towards the vase of water that contained the otol in freshness and bloom.

'I did think it was but to excite affection,' said the Tlascalan.

'I sent for it for this purpose, Gueicha. But these later events with my haughty princess, have transpired since the sun set, and I now shall make use of it for its more fatal virtue. If it fail me, you lose your head.'

'My head, prince, is not mine, but thine. The virtue of the otol flower can never fail,' said the Tlascalan.

It shall be tested.'

In what manner?' asked the slave, alarmed.

'On the person of one of the princess's female slaves.

'It exerts its virtue but once,' answered the Tlascalan.

'Is it so, ha?'

'So saith the legend.'

'It must be tried. I will pin my faith on no legend at such a crisis,' answered the prince, decidedly.

'I shall have to get another flower, then, for the princess,' said the slave.

'It cannot be got before morning.'

'But, noble prince, I told thee not how it was that it contained the principle of death.'

'Thou didst say,' said the prince, 'that, placed but for *one* moment on a maiden's bosom, it would produce love, — laid there for awhile, death. Is it not thus?'

'It is, your highness.'

'Then, what mean you?'

'Permit me to bring the flower, and I will show your highness.'

'Go, and bring it hither,' commanded the prince, with curiosity.

The slave crossed the room, and carefully removed the otol from the vase, and brought it to him.

'T is true, noble prince,' he said, 'that this flower produces both love and death; but the principle of love is only inherent in the flower. Behold, coiled within the petals, like a green and gilded cup, a small, delicate, and wonderfully beautiful serpent.'

'I do,' exclaimed the prince, with admiration.

'This is the principle of death. Each of these flowers contains one such serpent. It appears to the unobserving a portion of the inner flower.'

'Wherefore didst thou not tell me this, villain? Wouldst thou have had me risk the princess' life, had I given it to her?'

'Pardon, your highness. I did believe you knew this property it possessed.'

'Not that there was a serpent in it.'

'This serpent, your highness, is harmless as the petal of the flower until warmed to life by contact with the bosom in which it is placed. It then becomes lively and most venomous, and in an instant strikes its needle-like sting into the breast that has warmed it into life. Instant languor ensues, and the victim falls insensibly into a sleep that knows no waking.'

'Wonderful!' exclaimed the prince, gazing upon the beautiful and torpid animal. 'Alas! the poor princess,' he said, in a light, bitter tone, which his words best describe; 'thou wilt pierce a bosom, fair serpent, that my love has tried for years to penetrate. T is a rocky bosom, and thou must strike deep! Take back the flower, Gueicha! Thy hands will warm it into life too soon.'

'None but the warmth of a virgin's bosom hath the power to awake it from its lethargy.'

'It may be; but take care of it, and then come hither. Dost thou know the princess' Peruvian slave, Tzitzis?' he asked as the Tlascalan returned to him, after again depositing the flower in the vase.

'I do know her, and wish her as well as thou dost the princess.'

'Vile slave! dost thou name thyself with me, or her with the princess?' cried the prince, angrily. 'My free communication hath made thee forget thyself. By the gods! I will slay thee with my own hand.'

'Mercy, prince. I will not offend again,' pleaded the Tlascalan. 'I do know the Peruvian.'

'Go and seek her; and if she can be found out of the apartment of her mistress, bid her come hither. Be speedy and secret.'

The Tlascalan left his princely master, and hastened to obey his commands.

'Ha! thou art come, then, pretty slave?' he said, rising from the divan, as he beheld the Peruvian maiden enter. 'Come hither,' he added, returning and placing himself upon the seat from which, under the impulse of his feelings, he had involuntarily risen to meet her. 'I have a word or two to say to thee. How fareth my royal cousin, thy mistress? I trust she is in her usual health and beauty. She was a something pale, when last I saw her.'

'She hath been sad of late,' answered the maiden, diffidently.

'What hath made her sad? Not love, I'll make oath, pretty one,' said the prince, lightly, and with a shade of irony in his voice.

'She is doubtless thinking of her bridal, sir,' answered the Peruvian, with much simplicity.

'Humph! Do maidens look sad at such times?'

'When they love not the one they are to wed, your highness?' replied Tzitzis, with such a just blending of artlessness and audacity in her voice and look, that the prince, after gazing fixedly upon her face for an instant, was undecided which to give credit for her speech.

'So, you think the princess hath little favor for me, Tzitzis?' he said, speaking in his usual tone.

'She hath never said a word to me, your highness,' answered the maiden, who had scarcely taken her large black eyes from the floor since she first entered the prince's apartments.

'You are an artful minx,' exclaimed the prince, petulantly. 'Hath your mistress told you I honored her with a visit this evening?'

'She did not, my lord. I have been little with her. But I do remember I saw she had been weeping when I came in,' answered Tzitzis, with boldness so tempered by diffidence and real fear of the prince, that he knew not whether to get angry, or smile. He did both, however; and then, under the waning influence of the latter, said:

'Doth your mistress always weep after I have visited her?'

'Not always.'

'Not always. Does she sometimes?'

'Yes, your highness.'

'Come here; I would speak to you nearer. Hath the princess any one for whom she keeps her smiles?'

'She smiles on the emperor, and sometimes laughs with her pet birds, when they sing merrily.'

'You are as cautious as the prime minister. He feigns deafness, and you feign the most finished simplicity. Plainly; hath my cousin a favorite among the nobles of the court?'

'Among the nobles, your highness?' repeated the Peruvian, with an air of extreme surprise.

'Yes. The Lord Cuirí, for instance? I learn she hath called him once the court laureate.'

'She hath never thought of him, I can assure your highness,' replied Tzitzis, firmly.

'He hath writ her madrigals, and sung them to her as she walked the gardens, like a rustic swain?'

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'A woman may hear songs and not much favor the singer,' said the maiden, dryly.

'Thou hast ne'er spoken, in thy life, truer word than that, Peruvian,' said the prince, quickly.

Tzitzis had unintentionally, and without aim, sent a shaft true to the butt. She made no reply, and the prince continued. 'But she hath sung them, maiden?'

'So hath she sung thine, sir,' answered the slave, naively.

The prince bit his lip, and was for a moment silent. Tzitzis stole a glance to his face, and trembled at the expression that she saw at the instant upon it. He looked up, and caught her observing him, and instantly banished the dark aspect that had alarmed her, and said with a smile,

'I wonder no longer at the duplicity and art of the mistress, now that I have interrogated the maid. Pr'y thee, Tzitzis, doth my cousin love flowers when she is sad?'

'She loveth some flowers, sir.'

'What flowers doth she not love?'

'The llea and the colula, I believe.'

'The llea is crown-shaped, and the symbol of princely love; the colula signifies ambition, and is my maternal device, embossed on my shield. Thou art disposed to be witty, pretty one,' said the prince, darkly.

'Pardon, your highness,' said Tzitzis, with fear; 'I meant no offence. But she would never have such flowers in her lattice.'

The prince forced a calmness of voice, and said,

'I would send my cousin a present of a rare and beauteous flower, if I thought she would accept it. I have sent for thee to bear it to her. We parted somewhat roughly this evening, and I would fain send her this in token of reconciliation. Thou wilt bear it to her with these words?'

'I will, your highness.'

'Tlascalan!' said the prince, and glanced with his eye towards the vase.

The slave brought the fatal flower, and, kneeling before the divan, presented it towards his master.

'Thou seest it. It is a beautiful flower, an emblem of her own unsullied purity.'

'It is, indeed,' said Tzitzis, gazing upon the pure, bell-shaped otol.

'With an outside like snow, its petals, thou seest, continued the prince, are lined, on the inner side, with delicate green, and deep within lies a fair circle, like a zone of gold bestrewn with emeralds.'

'It is, indeed, lovely,' cried the Peruvian, with delighted surprise.

'And its sweet fragrance, thou perceivest, is with the least motion wafted through the chamber.'

'I think the princess will accept this, your highness, if —' here she hesitated.

'If what? Speak it out.'

'If I tell her not it came from thee.'

The eyes of the prince betrayed the pleasure this thought gave him; for it harmonized most perfectly with his desire, if possible, to escape the princess' suspicion. But he was too politic to let his gratification be plainly seen.

'No, no, Peruvian. Did I not say it was a gift of reconciliation? How can it be such, if she knows not that it was I that sent it?'

'I will tell her of it afterwards. It is a sweet and beautiful flower, and I would have my mistress see it; but, indeed, my lord prince —'

'Well — fear not.'

'She will not enjoy it if she knows it came from your highness.'

'I am flattered, truly,' said the prince, sarcastically. 'Well, then, bear it to her, and tell her what tale thou wilt. But, Peruvian, thou hast incurred my displeasure this evening, and — nay, kneel not, nor turn pale — hear me. As the princess must not know from whose hand it comes, it is but fair I should know where it is to be placed.'

'How does your highness mean?'

'Place this flower, when the princess sleeps, in her bosom, for my sake. She will, I fear, never let the unhappy donor rest there. I desire, at least, that his little gift should lie there. It, perchance, will have the charm to convert her hate into love.'

The prince spoke with real or well assumed feeling, and Tzitzis' tender heart was moved.

'I will obey your highness,' she said, with warmth. 'How long shall I let it remain?'

'Ten minutes will do,' said the Tlascalan.

'It shall be done, prince,' she said, hesitatingly.

'Then thou hast not only my forgiveness, but my favor. But beware thou take it not from the vase till she sleeps. Dost thou well heed me?'

'I do, your highness.'

'Then take the flower, and hie thee to my cruel mistress.'

'What is it called?' asked the maiden of the prince, as the Tlascalan replaced it carefully in the small alabaster vase, and placed both in her hand.

'It hath no name,' answered the prince, hastily.

'It is called Curiosity,' answered the slave, with ridicule.

The Peruvian made no reply, save by an indignant flash from her dark eyes, and received the vase with the beautiful and fatal gift.

'See thou stay not on thy way, nor take it from the vase till the princess hath slept. Then lay it upon her bosom.'

'I promise to do so, your highness,' she said, hastening from the apartment. The prince attended her to the farther door of the anteroom, repeating his command; and after she departed, followed her with his eyes as she hastened along the corridor, until she was no longer visible.

'If that fail, there is the dagger, at last,' he said, returning to his room, not so much addressing the Tlascalan, as giving audible utterance of his thoughts to himself. 'I think the Peruvian will do it. Gueicha!'

'Your highness.'

'I will not assassinate the emperor.'

'No?' cried the Tlascalan, with surprise.

'If the princess die, I take the throne as the next heir. My uncle stands not in my way to it.'

'If he suspect you of her death, he will gather the strength of the empire about him, even if his cycle be ended, and destroy you.'

'The secret is with me, and thee, and yonder Peruvian. *She* I leave to you. Let her not live to return from the princess' chamber. Thou must go, after midnight, and stand watch in some lurking-place near by, to wait the event. See to it. But, my uncle! I do not like his blood on my head.'

'Thou wilt not have a head three days longer, prince, if thou hesitate,' said the Tlascalan, boldly.

The prince stood reflecting a moment, and then said, in a decided voice, 'Be it so.'

‘How canst thou, then, take possession of the throne?’

‘The instant he is dead I will fill the palace with my own life-guard, and proclaim myself emperor. Men may talk, but all their talk will never bring the princess or the emperor back to life. I shall then be their monarch, and they must yield obedience.’

The prince remained some time indulging the reflections this bold expression of his purpose gave rise to. At length a new subject suddenly entered his mind, and he turned to his slave, and said quickly,

‘This beauteous maiden of the net-maker’s street. I have leisure for love till the princess’ fate be known; the emperor I shall leave till then.’

‘I did say I would seize and convey her hither.’

‘Stay. I need thee to wait and keep watch on the princess’ apartments. I will e’en have the winning of this lovely virgin in person. Let my secret chambers be ready to receive a guest.’

‘And the lover?’

‘He is beneath my regard, Tlascalan. I leave him to thee, inasmuch as I think you hold him some ill-favor.’

With these words the prince threw a mantle, woven of green feathers, over the rich undress he wore; put on a low, drooping cap, adorned with the plumes of the royal eagle, and placing a short sword beneath his arm, opened a side door hitherto covered by a large shield, and quitted the apartment.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PRINCE AND FATZIZA.

ON his way from his apartments through the palace, the prince glided within the shadows of the corridor with his cloak partly drawn over his features, as if to elude the observation of any one whom he might meet. His step was light and quick, and his whole air determined. He carefully avoided the rotunda, where the courtiers were in waiting before the door to the emperor’s chambers, and by a circuitous route approached the stairs of the battlements, where Elec was on guard. As he came near him he saw that a group of soldiers, not far from his post, seemed to be in close and earnest conversation with the mascal of the palace. They instantly separated, on seeing a stranger advancing, and Casipeti, the waterman, having effected his purpose in smothering in its birth the treachery of the soldiers, would have hurriedly passed him, when he caught him by the arm.

‘Ha! what dost thou here? Art thou the true mascal Casipeti, or an impostor? Methinks thy step is quicker, and thy bearing more decided than an hour ago.’

‘I pray thee, my lord prince,’ cried Casipeti, who immediately recognized the voice, and falling on his knees, as he felt sure his counterpart would have done, ‘be not angry with me.’

‘Why art thou here with the soldiery?’

‘Huitzil, the sergeant, is to marry Ana, my youngest daughter, and I was but settling the matter with him.’

‘I do believe thou liest, and that thou art he, at last, to whom I gave n ;

signet. But I will see to this to-morrow, and if thou hast been trifling with me, thou wilt rue it. Go into thy own apartment, and there remain the night. On thy life, tell no man thou hast seen me abroad.'

The waterman rose from his knees, and passed on a few steps, and then turning round, with a light laugh, cast something at the prince's feet, and fled. The prince sought for it a moment, and when he had picked it up, saw at a glance, by the light of the moon, that it was his own signet, which he had given, in the square, to the man in the guise of a waterman. With an exclamation of surprise and indignation, he grasped his sword, and turned in pursuit of the individual whom he was now convinced was not the mas-cal. But the waterman was already out of sight in the winding galleries of the palace; and recollecting, at the instant, his own desire to remain unknown, he replaced his sword beneath his arm, and, love and intrigue being paramount to curiosity and revenge, he kept on his way towards the stairs of the battlement leading into the court below.

'Stand!' challenged the sentinel, as he came up to him.

'An officer of the palace,' replied the prince.

'The countersign!' demanded the young man, resolutely, presenting at the same time his pike at the stranger's breast.

'The emperor.'

'Pass,' said young Elec, who showed himself to be a bolder soldier than wooer.

'Sentry?' asked the prince, in a low tone, 'has the mas-cal of the palace been forth to-night?'

'He has, my lord,' answered the young man, supposing himself to be addressing one of the nobles.

'Are you sure it was he who just left here?'

'Yes, my lord.'

'How is it, that such as he has the countersign?'

'He gave no countersign, but showed me the prince's signet, saying he was on duty for his highness,' answered Elec, who had known nothing of the conspiracy divulged to his comrades.

'T is as I believed,' said the prince, thoughtfully, to himself. 'There is some treachery meditated, of which I am the intended victim. Soldier!' he said, sternly, and disclosing his features, 'I am Prince Palipan. This man is a traitor, disguised. Arrest him, if he attempt to repass your post. If he escape from the palace, your head shall answer for it. And, hark you! Keep secret, that you have seen me to-night.'

With this warning and menace, the prince hastily descended the winding steps of the tower, and gained the court below. It was bordered by lemon-trees, which, with their thick branches, formed so dark a walk around its sides, that, although the moon poured a flood of unclouded light upon the court and its glittering fountains, one walking beneath them could not be seen. His object being secrecy, he turned to one side on reaching the area, and glided along beneath the trees with the stealthy step of an assassin. The path wound round an angle of the wing occupied by the princess, and as he came beneath her lattice he paused an instant, and, though it was thirty feet above his head, looked up, as if he could learn by the eye something of the result of his design through the mission of Tzitzis. A faint ray of light streamed through the casement, but all was still as the death his soul wished would soon reign there.

'At length, he was passing on with the same light step as before, when,

within a few feet of him, on the opposite side of the buttress, he heard the low, thrumming of a *zitzi*, one of the sweetest stringed instruments known to the Aztec nobles, and the instant afterwards the deep, rich voice of a man singing a song of love. It was addressed to the princess, and every tone was full of the devotion and tender passion of the singer.

SONG OF LORD CUIRI TO EYLLA.

I dreamed, in morning's slumbers,
That in the heavens afar,
Glowing with beauty, bright and clear,
There was a queenly star,
That from its vaulted canopy
Looked kindly smiling down on me.

That virgin star ! to view it
My frame and spirit fired
With passion's maddening extasy,
And all my soul aspired
To gain that gem on Night's calm brow,
When, lo ! it changed, and it was *Thou* !

The bosom of the prince burned with mingled jealousy and rage. The voice, he thought, was not unknown to him ; and, drawing his sword from his cloak, he turned back, and noiselessly approached the spot. Beneath a tall, graceful atl tree, the feathery top of which shaded her casement, stood a youth, with his face uplifted to the window as he sang, the moonlight streaming between the branches full upon it. It was the young Lord Cuiiri. The prince gazed on him for an instant, with the fiercest passions kindling in his breast. At length, maddened by the words he sung, he leaped from his covert, and, with his sword levelled at the noble youth's heart, ran against him. The weapon met a coat of mail, and shattered in his grasp. The noble staggered back a few paces, then recovered himself, drew his sword, and looked around for his antagonist. But he was gone.

The prince, seeing that his attempt on the life of his rival had failed, had instantly retired within the impenetrable shade of the lemon-walk, and hasted on his way towards the water-side with flying speed. He did not desire, by open contact, unarmed too, as he now was, to expose himself to his rival at such a time, inwardly resolving on the morrow to take his revenge in his own hands.

'It is for this noble, then, that the false princess has slighted my love,' were his thoughts. 'It is for one beneath her rank she rejects one of her own blood. That she loves him, and has given him encouragement, is plain, or he would never have had the boldness to do what he hath done this night. Pray the gods she live till I cast this into her teeth. My Lord Cuiiri, you and I have somewhat to do with each other on the morrow,' he added, with the bitter irony of tone in which he was accustomed to express the darker passions of his soul. As he came to the side of the bright water, its shores of palaces and temples casting vast shadows into the flood, its silvery bosom covered with a thousand still barges, save here and there a solitary one moving up or down the stream, he paused an instant, to see if he were observed, and then approached a small boat, shaped like a swan, in which, hitherto unobserved, reclined four men.

'It is he,' cried one, rising up in the stern. Instantly two others were at their oars, and a fourth sprung on shore, to receive the prince. This one,

who was a stout, heavily-framed man, was habited in steel, like a soldier, as also was he who stood up in the stern. The other two were in the common blue and crimson-colored coarse garb of boatmen.

'We did begin to think you had missed us, your highness,' said the man, with equal respect and boldness.

'I have been detained, good Mictlan. Push off at once.'

The prince sprang into the boat, and in a few seconds, was moving swiftly across the water, towards the quarter of the net-maker's street.

Fatziza, the lovely bondmaiden, whose beauty, and indifference to his love, had inflamed the breast of the licentious prince, was alone in her brother's chamber. He had called in a moment, after his return from the palace, to bid her remain within, nor whatever commotion she might hear in the streets, to venture forth or to look abroad. He had just now parted from her, and left her in tears. The two dearest objects of her heart's affections, her brother and her lover, she knew, however they might attempt to disguise it from her, were in the greatest danger.

'He hath told me,' she said, 'that the revolt will not take place — that the princess will grant all we desire, on her accession to the throne. Indeed, the sweet princess would do every thing for the happiness of her subjects — but Montezuma hath told me this to calm my fears. Alas, alas, why hath heaven so ordered it, that our hearts' dearest affections ever become the instruments of our greatest and bitterest sorrow! Deep love is but the arrow of deep grief, when the object of our love is endangered! My poor brother! my beloved Sismarqui! May the gods protect you both!'

She leaned her head upon her hand, and gazed sorrowfully upon the water. A boat gradually emerged from the shadowy line of the opposite shore, and approached towards the foot of the street. It filled her eye, and grew larger and more distinctly upon her vision; yet she saw it not. Men were in it, and their number and forms became visible, yet the object made no impression upon her brain. Her eyes were on vacancy, and her thoughts were sad, and with those she loved.

At length the boat darted from her unobserving gaze, into a recess of the shore, shaded by trees overhanging from a garden wall, and disappeared in the black shadows that obscured it. A single individual landed from the boat, and came into the street, near the house. It was the prince. He cautiously surveyed the dwelling, and approached the balcony, where he had seen the maiden seated in the afternoon. The moon shone down coldly and brightly aslant into it. It was silent and deserted. The street itself was quiet; but occasionally he would start at distant sounds within the town, that caused him to pause and listen. But as all was still about him, he continued his observation of the house. He placed his hand upon the low door beneath the balcony; but it was fast and resisted his strength.

'There is precaution here. I must scale the balcony! Ha! what sounds as of the roaring of the sea are there, in the distance! They have subsided. Perhaps it is the wind, mourning among the trees. There it is again! There is no wind! It sounds like the suppressed voices of a multitude!'

He listened attentively, with his face towards the quarter whence the deep sounds came, and in a few seconds all was silent again. As he was about to place his hand upon the light column of the balcony, his man-at-arms, Mictlan, came hastily from the boat.

'Your highness,' he said, in a low voice of surprise and alarm, as he reached the prince, 'do you not hear strange sounds?'

'I did just now, but they are hushed,' answered the prince, again listening.

'I fear some tumult among the people.'

'They will have only each other's throats to cut,' said the prince, laughing. 'There are no troops there to employ them. Yet,' he added, more seriously; 'from what I have seen and heard this day, I should not be surprised if there were some attempt of the serfs to attack the garrisons. I hear it no longer. Be within call, and be ready to receive my charge, and push off at an instant's warning. There is something in those sounds more than I dare believe; nevertheless, I must not be driven from my purpose.'

He spoke in the prompt manner of one who suspects, but is indifferent to danger, and the soldier lounged slowly towards his boat, but keeping within sight. The prince then, taking another survey of the silent abode, assisted by the column, lightly ascended the balcony.

'I am within the works. Now to find my fair foe!'

He instantly dropped its curtain around it, to conceal himself from observation, and placed his hand upon the narrow door that led from it into the maiden's chamber. He gently pressed against it, but it resisted his steady strength.

'I would not break it in, lest I alarm where I wish to soothe,' he said, looking about for some other means to effect his object.

As he did so, he saw that the balcony communicated by a narrow terrace, with the water-side of the humble dwelling. He stepped lightly along it, and was passing around the angle of the building, when he suddenly arrested himself with a suppressed exclamation of delighted surprise. In the open casement of the room on that side, he beheld a round, white arm, shining in the moonlight, like turned ivory, supporting the cheek of the maiden. Her face was turned partly from him, presenting the outline of her profile, in all the softness of its exquisite finish. Her face was pensive, her eyes downcast, and he thought he could detect a tear, glittering on her cheek. He gazed with pleasure at the anticipation of success in his passion, but his heart was not untouched by her tender and gentle sorrow. He felt that she was far more lovely than he had imagined her to be, and that in the possession of her, he should be well repaid for any sacrifice. Twice he moved to approach her, but there was a holiness in her tearful beauty — a sacredness in her sorrow, that he dared not profane. His feelings, as he irresistibly lingered and gazed upon her, became still more and more interested, and love, or something tenderer and purer than the voluptuary's passion, that heretofore alone reigned in his bosom, was awakened in it. He continued to observe her for a few moments, and then drew back, as if intending to pursue a course in relation to her, different from that which he had at first contemplated. Casting his cloak upon the railing, and appearing in the rich and graceful dress he had worn in his own rooms, he placed his hat beneath his arm, and leaning forward to observe her, commenced, unseen by her, a song of the most touching tenderness. The air most sweetly harmonized with her feelings, and the words seemed spoken from the heart.

SERANADE.

The sweet-voiced *huonla* * watches
 The long and weary night,
 In sad and silent solitude,
 Till breaks the morning's light;
 Then with untiring pinions,
 Till noontide, borne along,
 He pours upon the enraptured air
 The gushing flood of song!

Thus, like the *huonla* watching,
 My heart has waited long
 To pour its love upon thine ear
 In the sweet breath of song!
 I watch, love, for the breaking
 Of morn from those bright eyes
 Then o'er my weary, lonely watch,
 Day of my hope, arise!

The maiden slowly raised her heavy eyelids, and seemed, at first, to listen as if the sounds were a part of her waking dream. But by degrees she became conscious of the reality, and started with pleased alarm—for there was too much tenderness in the tones—too much gentleness in the words that fell so sweetly upon her enraptured ear, for real terror to be associated with them. She nevertheless trembled with the surprise; the quick color came to her cheek; while, with startled eyes, she looked in the direction of the sounds. She thus stood, half-flying, half-lingering, like a startled fawn, until the singer had ended, when the charm which had bound her was broken, and she turned to fly from the lattice. As she did so, the prince, who had observed these effects, appeared and cast himself at her feet.

'Sweetest maid, I implore you, fly not from the presence of one who adores you.'

He caught her hand as he spoke, and gazed up into her face with such passionate, yet persuasive eloquence, that although terrified beyond measure, she hesitated an instant, and suffered her eyes to rest upon his fine face up-turned to her, in the full moonlight. It wore the expression that few maidens could resist, seconded as it was by the voice that the moment before had acted as a spell upon her senses. She struggled nevertheless, to release her hand, and cried, alarmed,

'Pray, sir, release me.'

'Loveliest Fatziza, do not be thus cruel! Do not break a devoted heart!'

'I may not hold discourse with thee, sir,' she said, resolutely. 'The hour is late, and I am far beneath thy degree.'

'Beauty ennobles woman! Do not fly, I beseech thee,' cried the prince, with a deference and warmth of feeling that surprised himself. 'But if thou wilt go, cruel virgin, thou hast thy liberty.'

As he spoke, he released her hand, and bent his head despondingly upon his breast. She retreated a step or two, and then looked upon him with a glance of mingled surprise and pain. His manner awakened a feeling in her woman's heart that was most favorable to him. Few maidens can behold unmoved, a young and handsome man bowed at her feet with the weight of unrequited love. She regarded him with painful interest. Her impulse

* A bird that watches for the dawn, and then flies and sings unceasingly till noon.

was to fly; but his lowly attitude, his deep depression of manner, restrained her, though no longer detained by him. His releasing her operated also in his favor. She stopped, and from that instant the prince felt that his power over her was secured. He had at first determined to bear her off rudely to the palace; but the attitude in which he had beheld her first touched his heart, and changed his determination. He felt an interest in her that caused him at once to reject any thing like violence. This interest, as it ever does, made the object of it now sacred; he therefore resolved to try the power of gentleness, and to operate alone upon her heart, feeling, that if he could for an instant win her sympathy, he might awaken in her bosom an interest for him that would be most favorable to his views.

‘If I can but make her *feel*,’ he said within himself, reasoning like all successful wooers, ‘I shall afterwards find it easy to make her love me. Methinks her pure *love* were as well worth the seeking now that I have seen her again, as that of my proud cousin. But I shall have time to woo her only in my own halls. Once make the impression, and she will forgive me after. But take her away ere she feels awakened any interest in me, and I can never hope afterwards for aught but indignation and hatred.’

Such were his thoughts as he kneeled before her, with his head fallen upon his breast, like a suppliant for life awaiting the answer of his judge. She was evidently struggling between fear and feeling. At length the former prevailed, and she moved further from him, as if to quit the room. He lifted his head, and extended his hands silently and earnestly towards her. Her retreat was arrested by the silent appeal, and she came back a step. That step, the prince imagined, fixed the seal to the consummation of his fondest hopes.

‘Noble sir,’ she said, with dignity, ‘it is difficult for a youthful maiden, like myself, to witness, unmoved, the deep admiration of a noble youth. But I may not listen to you or remain with you. If I were free in heart and hand, the difference in our stations would make it crime in me to listen to you. As it is, I am a betrothed bride; and therefore it makes me doubly guilty.’

‘Nay, leave me not, fairest virgin,’ he cried, impassionedly, rising to his feet, and taking her hand, ere she was aware or could prevent it; ‘leave me not. I swear to you no man hath deeper or more devoted love for you than I have. You shall be my bride — my wedded wife.’

‘Talk not thus, my lord; you know it cannot be,’ she said, firmly.

‘It shall be,’ he said, imperatively.

She started at the stern tones of his voice, and became suddenly pale. The hand he held trembled like a frightened bird imprisoned in his grasp, and she seemed to be overcome by some sudden and fearful recollection. She nearly sunk to the floor, but by great exertion of mind sustained herself.

‘What means this, trembler?’ he asked, in a tone of tenderness as much unlike his late harsh ones, as his voice had been from the first moment she heard it on the balcony.

‘My lord, my lord, I have been deceived,’ she said, faintly. ‘Alas! why did I not suspect thee?’

‘So you have discerned in me, pretty one, notwithstanding all my caution, the masked cavalier of this afternoon?’ he said, playfully.

‘My lord, you have come hither to render me miserable,’ she cried. ‘I knew not your face. I recognized not, till now, your voice, or I should not have lingered.’

He smiled at the artless energy of her avowal, and said,

'So, if I had been another knight than what I prove to be, you would have received me with becoming grace. Now then, sweet, I am no longer the bold cavalier of thy abhorrence, but the knight thou hast been so gracious to. By my honor! you are dearer to me than ever was lady to knight on earth. If you will forgive my rudeness to-day, and receive my homage, I swear I will love you with my whole heart. A false maiden, whom I offered it to, this day cast it away, and I have it in my hand, ready to give to her who is fairer than she.'

'Nay, my lord. It is no credit to a maiden to receive the homage of a heart already broken,' she said, with spirit, yet with slight playfulness. 'But, my lord, were your heart whole, it can never be of value in my eye. I thank you for your attentions, and shall ever remember you with gratitude.'

He looked sharply at her face, to see if she were not speaking with irony, which he suspected, and not being able, from the faint light, to detect its nicer shades of expression, said, somewhat seriously,

'You are prudish, and, for a serf's daughter, treat a knight's love full lightly. Now, by mine honor, fair virgin, when I beheld thee this day in thy balcony, I felt for thee the deepest admiration on account of thy charms. I discoursed with thee, and found thy mind equalled thy person. I left thee, 't is true, something rudely, but a noble's kiss would not have hurt thee but for the boor, who afterward chose to resent it. Nay — nay; be not angry, nor try to get away. I am but telling thee the progress of my love. I thought of thee continually after; and when, some four hours since, my own lady-love discarded me, I swore I would give to thee the love she scorned. I came hither and saw thee in thy window weeping. My heart was touched; and what before was light passion, the sight of thee softened and hallowed into love. I now, therefore, notwithstanding thy coldness and scorn, offer thee my heart.'

'Noble sir,' said Fatziza, who had listened to his relation with impatience, but not without interest, 'I do believe it to be as you say. Your manner and voice seem to be the expression of truth. But I cannot listen to you. My heart is another's.'

'And,' he exclaimed, quickly and angrily, 'that other is —'

'My equal, my lord,' she replied, firmly.

'Maiden, he is a serf,' and such will always remain. Thou art noble already, by thy beauty, and will degrade thyself with such an alliance. Think no more of him. He offers thee a hovel, and a drudging life of degradation and toil; I offer thee a palace, and wealth, and a life of luxurious indolence. All the return I ask, is your love.'

'My lord,' she said, touched by his earnestness, 'I have no heart to give.' The next instant she added, with resentful irony, 'it is in the hovel, with Sismarqui.'

'There, then, shall your person never be, without which, little were worth your heart!' cried the prince, stung at the tone she assumed, and feeling, that now that he was identified with the masked cavalier, there was little hope of impressing her with the tender sentiments he at first sought to inspire.

As he spoke, he seized her, and bore her to the balcony. The man-at-arms, who was within hearing, immediately appeared at his call, and received her from him. The suddenness of the act had deprived her of speech, and she was in the arms of the soldier before she realized her situation. Instantly she filled the air with a loud shriek, and cried aloud,

‘Oh Montezuma! Sismarqui! help!’

The prince cast her scarf over her face, and, leaping to the ground, bade him bear her to the boat. The men were at their oars, and, as soon as she was placed in it, the boat shot from the land towards the opposite shore with velocity. The maiden had fainted before reaching the boat, and they crossed the water in silence, the prince folding her in his arms, and gazing upon her marble brow with mingled pity and pleasure.

‘Mictlan,’ he said to his man-at-arms, ‘take a little water in thy hand and pour it on her temples. She may die.’

‘Never fear, your highness,’ said the man, bluntly; ‘I have seen ’um lay that way for hours. It’s as nat’ral as sleep for ’um. Besides, if she come to, she’ll give another alarm with her sweet voice.’

‘It is very true. Row on, and reach the steps as soon as possible,’ said the anxious prince, fanning her with his bonnet.

‘Did you not hear a low, deep shout just now, as we were putting her in the boat?’ said Mictlan. ‘It seemed as if a thousand men were growling at once.’

‘I did hear it. There it is again. There is something in progress in the quarter of the armorers, from which direction it seems to come.’

‘Do you see the diamond stone on the peak of Ix, your highness?’ said the man, pointing over the city to the west, where the dark line of mountains that walled in the vale of Alcolo was distinctly visible.

‘I do,’ answered the prince, without lifting his gaze from the sweet, pale face that fascinated it.

‘It burns red and bloody to-night. I noticed it an hour ago. It is a sign of wars. I should not be surprised if something were to happen soon.’

The prince looked up, at these words, and glanced his eye towards the peak of Ix. The blazing stone that reflected the moonlight did indeed seem to shine with a sanguinary hue, its color resembling that of a pale ruby.

‘It is as you say,’ he said, after watching it an instant, and then returning to survey the features of the maiden.

‘It bodes something, your highness,’ said the man, gloomily.

‘Thou art superstitious, Mictlan. See, we approach the land. Guide the boat within yonder shadow, — then take up this lovely burden, and follow me.’ The boat was soon at the palacé steps, and the prince, taking his way by a different route from that by which he came forth, skirted the battlements by a narrow terrace, until he came quite to the rear of the palace, on a close street composed of courtier’s lodges and pavilions, each adorned by marble porticos, and encircled by gardens of fruit and flowers. At the termination of the terrace was a small gate, that led into a court surrounded by a high wall. This gate he opened with a private key, and crossing the court, came to a door on the opposite side in the wall. This he unlocked also; but instead of leading through the wall, it opened upon a narrow staircase, that wound within it. Carefully closing it behind the man-at-arms, he led him to the top, where a second and more spacious door admitted them into a private gallery. This they traversed, when the prince stopped before a panel at the extremity, and pressed his hand against it. It rolled slowly aside into the wall, and exposed the interior of an elegant apartment, softly lighted by invisible lamps, which shed throughout the room a delightful fragrance. The prince pointed to an ottoman, upon which the man-at-arms laid his lovely burden, and then retired by another door, with which he seemed familiar.

Fatziza was no longer insensible, yet for the purpose of planning escape, she still feigned to be so. The fanning of the prince had restored her to consciousness, and from that moment she was collected, and conscious of all that passed around her. She soon ascertained she was carried towards the palace of the emperor; and, though greatly alarmed, closely observed the doors and passages through which she was borne. When the man-at-arms left the apartment, the prince came and knelt beside her, and for an instant gazed upon her with such pity and tenderness, that she could not but be satisfied that he loved her, and felt, that if she escaped in safety she could forgive him. He took her hand in his, and after pressing it between them a moment, as if to communicate the warmth of his heart to it, pressed it to his lips, and sighed.

'Ah, sweet maiden! did she know how true a heart loves her, she would not treat me thus cruelly. I would have had it otherwise than it is, — borne her hither by her own will, rather than by force, as she has compelled me to do. I must seek her forgiveness, and woo her where no favored rival shall come between. 'Tis wonderful, my passing passion for a net-maker's daughter should have turned to love. But 'tis said a wounded heart is tender, and by mine honor! the princess hath made mine full sore to-night. I must, I see, get this sweet virgin to bind it to her bosom, and make it whole. I would she loved not another. How her hand beats! 'Tis time she were restored. I will bathe her forehead with ice.'

'My lord prince,' she cried, rising, and casting herself, to his surprise, at his feet, 'I have heard your words, and do believe you love me. Oh, release me then, by your regard for me.'

'How know you me to be the prince?'

'By your allusion to the princess. I feel now that my fate depends wholly on your generosity. As a noble, your deep love, had my heart been disengaged, might have been honorable. As the prince, I can be regarded by you only with crime. My lord — my gracious prince! I appeal to your honor. Save me!'

She dropped her head upon his hand, which she had seized, and wept till it was bathed with her tears. He was affected by her sorrow, and said gently, believing at the moment that he felt what he said,

'Lovely Fatziza, be not alarmed. If I cannot win your love, I will restore you to your home.'

'Nay — nay — detain me not, prince. You can never win what I have not to lose. Permit me to return this night. One hour beneath thy roof, and my heart and love were worthless.'

'You are safe here, sweet maid. Content yourself to remain until certain events I look for on the morrow, transpire. Till then this and the adjoining room are sacred to you. No one besides myself holds access to them. I have an inducement to offer you by-and-by, which I think will tempt you,' he said, with a smile.

'No — no; nothing but freedom. Prince, I implore you! Your hopes are in vain. Save me!'

He had disappeared. She flew into the adjoining room — it was empty. She sought around the gorgeous chambers, cast aside the silver arras, and lifted every hanging that could conceal a door, but in vain. In silent despair she cast herself upon the ottoman, and wept.

CHAPTER XVI

THE TEST.

THE Peruvian, on quitting the apartments of the prince, with the otol flower, flew swiftly towards the chamber of her mistress, from whom she had been so long absent. She liked not the manner of the prince, nor the tone of his voice, when he presented her with the gift to bear to the princess; and, though unsuspicious of danger lurking in the flower itself, she could not banish the suspicion that he meditated evil towards her mistress in taking so much pains to obtain a reconciliation with her. Nevertheless, she resolved to fulfil her promise, and afterwards warn her to be on her guard against future favors or advances from him.

'If he were my cousin and lover,' she said to herself, 'I should be afraid to take any thing from him. I would n't show him the least favor. I should do more than the gentle princess has done; I should tell him roundly I did not like him, nor would I like him. She has said something sharp to him to-night, he says. It must have been very sharp to have caused a quarrel on both sides. All I hope is, it may never be made up, nor shall it be, if I can help it.'

Thus far ran the little maiden's thoughts, when she reached the inner door of the princess' room. She tapped softly, and was admitted. The princess was reclining on her couch, with a silver scroll in her hand, on which golden characters were delicately traced.

'Where have you loitered, girl?' she asked quickly, as she entered. 'T is half an hour since you left me. Saw you him safely forth the palace by the private postern?'

'I did, my noble mistress,' answered the slave, with a low obeisance.

The princess paused and glanced again upon her scroll, which she had been reading; for there was something in the Peruvian maid's look at the earnestness with which she inquired after the young man, that confused her; and the conscious blush heightened her loveliness. She felt her confusion, and throwing aside the scroll, asked suddenly,

'What do you hold in your hand?'

'A flower, sweet princess.'

'Bring it hither.'

The slave knelt with it at her feet.

'It is a rare flower, indeed. How wondrously beautiful the shape! What fragrance! How delicate its petals! and within is an exquisitely formed cup, of green and golden dyes. T' is a fair flower, indeed.'

'Touch it not, my princess,' said Tzitzis, quickly, as Eylla laid a finger gently upon the snowy petals.

'Why not, maiden?' she demanded, withdrawing her hand, and fixing upon her a look of surprise and inquiry.

'I believe it has some virtue,' answered the Peruvian, hesitating, 'that makes maidens love those they hate,' for in some such warning alone could she but faintly express her fears of mischief.

'Then the gods forfend! I will naught with it,' exclaimed the princess, starting back with a laugh half earnest — half credulous. 'How came you in the possession of so dangerous a plant? and why did you bring it hither?'

Nay, my sweet mistress, be not angry with me. As I was coming hither,' she continued, archly, 'a noble cavalier, who had somewhat suffered beneath your frown, gave it me, and bade me —'

'Who was this cavalier? what did he bid thee?' interrogated the princess. 'Out with it.'

'It was the prince,' she at length answered, firmly, as if feeling that she owed her duty to her mistress, rather than to him.

'The prince? How dare he!' cried the princess Eylla, with surprise and indignation. 'Hath this flower truly the charm you name?'

'He said it had, I think.'

'Can he be guilty of this! What said he? word for word?' demanded she, sternly.

'That he had been so unfortunate as to incur your displeasure, and desired me to place this flower upon your bosom while you slept, that it might inspire you with love for him.'

'And *you* brought it hither to obey?'

'No, my noble lady,' cried Tzitzis, trembling; 'I could not but promise, for fear of him. But I was sure I should tell you ere I could do it,' she added, with honest simplicity.

'I do believe there is no charm in the flower,' said the princess, turning from her, and surveying it attentively. 'He hath sent it to conciliate me, and the love he seeks to inspire is to grow out of my gratitude for the gift. The charm he speaks of is only figurative. But the prince need not hope. He hath heard my last word. 'T is a sweet flower. Were it not so late, thou shouldst bear it back to him. In the morning it shall be returned with the answer, that his flower hath lost its spell. Place it on the window. Hath it a name?'

'The Tlascalan told me, saucily, when I asked him, it was called "Curiosity."'

'The Tlascalan! was he with the prince when it was given thee?'

'He was. When was ever the prince without him?'

'Nothing that the prince ever does in concert with that evil wretch, that hath not evil at the bottom. Name the words again.'

'He said to me, 't is a gift of reconciliation; and when I told him your highness would scarce accept it, if you knew whence it came, he said then, tell her what tale of it thou wilt, when she awakes; but as she sleeps, place it upon her bosom, where I fear she will never let the unhappy donor rest.'

'Said he so?'

'And further thus: I desire, at least, that my little gift should lie there.'

'Said the prince this?'

'He did, your highness, saying, that if you were not to know from whom it came till you awaked, he ought to have the happiness of knowing where it reposed while you were sleeping.'

'Mark me, maiden,' said the princess, impressively, after a few moments' reflection. 'The prince, it seems, designed not to send the flower for a token of reconciliation from the first, since he gave it up so readily. So I got the flower, I think it were, he cared not how I got it. Was it not so?'

'Such seemed his manner in pressing it upon me,' answered Tzitzis, with animation.

'Bring me the vase again,' said the princess, resolutely. 'I do suspect my evil cousin hath some deeper purpose in this, than appears to the eye.'

'What do you suspect, my noble princess?' asked the maiden, with alarm, on witnessing the glowing cheek of her mistress.

'I cannot tell — I dare not think. I may be wrong, and judge him. Place the vase here. The fragrance is too sweet and the flower too fresh to contain poison,' she said, examining without touching it.

'Poison?' repeated the Peruvian, with terror.

'Did he hold it himself in his hands?' she asked of the maiden.

'A long time.'

'Did he inhale the fragrance?'

'He did, and so did the Tlascalan.'

'Then I fear I have been uncharitable to my cousin. Send thy companion, Telitza, hither.'

Tzitzis left the apartment, and the princess once more bent over the vase and examined the beautiful gift of the prince, with mingled admiration and suspicion.

'I know not what all this means,' she said, aloud. 'It is not courtesy; for after our parting he would be little likely to show it me. It is not to open the way for a reconciliation, (though a flower, as every one knows, were ever to me a most welcome messenger,) or why should he have been willing to let the donor's name be withheld. It hath something evil at the bottom of it. Perhaps it possesses the power Tzitzis spoke of, to convert indifference into love. I will at least test it. There is plainly — horrible thought! but it will not out of my mind — no poison in its fragrance or touch, or they would not have held it. I will test its power to charm a maiden's heart, — for such purpose alone can he have sent it to me. Shame on the Prince Palipan! to seek by spells to win a true woman's love. I will prove its power at once — and, if it be proven — the whole empire shall ring with the baseness of this dishonorable prince. Not a maiden in all the land, but would cry shame on such a man; not a knight or serf but would deride such a princely wooer. Here comes my pretty Telitza. She hath been suddenly waked from deep sleep, and her large, lustrous eyes, look wild with the surprise and light.'

As she spoke, Tzitzis entered with a young Peruvian girl, who had scarcely reached her seventeenth summer, with a brown, beautiful face, and long and shining raven hair. Her figure was full and exquisitely rounded, and in its motions soft and pliant as those of the gracefully moving *tapir* of her own forests. Her large black eyes wore a startled look, like an alarmed deer's, while every other instant the heavy lids, on which sleep sat heavily, would droop over them till the curved fringe would rest on her cheek. She was of less stature than Tzitzis, and her beauty was far less *spirituelle*. The princess smiled to see her struggling between sleep and wakefulness, and said, kindly,

'Come hither, Telitza. I would show you a rare flower.'

The maiden's languor suddenly left her at the sound of her mistress' voice, and going forward, she knelt beside the vase, and gazed upon the otol with an expression of admiration.

'Telitza,' said the princess, carelessly, 'methinks you and the handsome page of my lord Cuiri are of late somewhat estranged. Hath there been a quarrel?'

'I never loved him enough to quarrel with him, my princess,' said the slave, blushing.

'Then my cousin and I should have well loved,' she said, aside. 'But

pry thee, what hath caused the distance between you for some weeks? There was a time when, each morning, your dark hair was dressed with flowers of his own presenting.

'He gave flowers to Tzitzis also,' answered the maiden, with simplicity.

'A good cause for quarrel. You loved him, or you would not have cared to how many maidens besides he gave his gifts. I would have thee make up with him.'

'Indeed, my noble princess,' cried the maiden, casting herself at her feet, and seizing and kissing her hand; 'I do not love him. I *cannot* love Izcalli.'

'He loves you, Telitza. 'Tis but three days since he came to me with a sad countenance, and implored me to intercede for him with thee.'

'I cannot love him,' said she, earnestly.

'Dost thou love any one else?'

'No. I never loved any one but —' Here she stopped, and hung her head, blushing.

'But Izcalli, you were about to say,' said the princess, smiling.

The maiden covered her burning cheek with the veil of her flowing hair, and was silent.

'Well, child; thou shalt not love him, nor be asked to love him, if to-morrow thou remainest in the same mind.'

'Thanks, thanks, kind mistress,' she cried, gratefully.

'Yet, thou art so near loving him,' continued the princess, playfully, 'it were a charity to reconcile thee. But thou shalt hear no more of this from me. Go to sleep again, for thine eyes are already beginning to grow heavy. Nay — go not back to thy pallet, but lay upon this mat of floss beside my couch. I need thy presence here to-night.'

The maiden gladly availed herself of the permission of her mistress; and, sinking upon the rug, with one arm beneath her head, was soon buried in deep and gentle slumber.

'Now will I test the property of my cousin's gift,' said the princess to the Peruvian. 'If it truly possess it, methinks Izcalli, on the morrow, will be happier in the love of his mistress than the prince will be.'

With these words the princess took the rich flower carefully from the vase, and knelt over the fair sleeper, and opening her bosom, placed it within it.

'I know not how long it must lie there — perhaps till she wakes,' observed the princess.

'Ten minutes, said the prince,' replied the maiden. 'I will watch by her.'

'It can surely do no harm, if it produce not the effect I look for,' said the princess, gazing upon the sleeper with tender interest.

'Indeed, I do believe Telitza would be the happier to love Izcalli. But she has too much pride to be reconciled to him.'

'Hark! heard you not music?' exclaimed the princess, at this instant. 'It is the *xitzil* beneath the lattice. Go and see what it is.'

The Peruvian flew to the lattice, and looked down for an instant, and then turning to the princess, said:

'I see, at the foot of the atl, a cavalier; 'but I cannot distinguish his face, or form.'

'Hist! there is his voice,' said the princess, approaching the lattice. 'Can it be the prince?'

'It is not the prince's voice,' said the maiden, archly.

'You speak as if you knew it, maiden?'

'Listen, my mistress. Do you not recognize it?'

'The song is one of love. 'T is bold! I know not the voice. It may be the — the — Montezuma,' she said, hesitatingly. 'List!' she exclaimed, quickly, as a tender strain rose to her ear. 'I know the song and voice, now. 'T is my lord Cuiiri.'

'I thought it strange, my princess, that you should have forgotten the noble and youthful Lord Cuiiri, who thinks more of a glance from your eye, or of your shadow, than the haughty and cold prince does of your whole person.'

'I am sorry for it,' said the princess, with interest. 'The song hath suddenly ceased. Ha! there is a ringing sound of steel, and now of conflict. Look forth!' cried the princess, with alarm.

Tzitzis was already looking down upon the scene, when spoken to, and cried, with surprise and indignation,

'I saw, my noble lady, the singer set upon by some one, who rushed from the lemon walk, and thrust at him with his sword. The sword broke against his mail, and the assassin has fled.'

'Hath my lord come to harm? Quick — tell me!'

'No, my lady,' answered the maiden, again looking down. 'He staggered at the blow, but hath recovered himself, and now seeks the assassin.'

'Pray heaven, they meet not. 'T is the prince.'

'I thought so, but dared not speak it.'

'It can be none else.'

'There sounds the *vitzil* again,' cried the Peruvian, with delight. 'Look, my lady! he hath returned, and taken his place at the foot of the tree, and resumes his song. A gallant knight, and brave. I do believe my lord Cuiiri, besides being the handsomest man, the first noble, and the best knight in the empire, hath a truer and gentler heart, for a wooer, than any man in Mexico. Hark! my princess. How sweetly he sings, and how tenderly.'

SERENADE.

[CONTINUED.]

Thou beautiful and peerless,
It was upon thy throne,
That 'mid a world of rival queens,
Didst rule the night alone,
And with a radiance so divine,
Their every ray was quenched in thine.

I rose on fancy's pinions,
To seek thy throne afar;
But, lo! thy form was changed again,
And thou wert now a star!
Oh, that that peerless gem of light
Would cheer again my spirit's night!

'He is too bold, maiden. Such words should not be addressed to a princess' ear from any noble. My lord Cuiiri is too bold.'

'And he doth think so, it seems,' said the maiden, sadly, looking from the casement as the singer's voice ceased; 'for he hath ended his song, and disappeared. His heart felt your displeasure.'

'It is better his heart should feel it thus, if it doth, than that I should be pained to express it to him more plainly. I do grieve that this noble lord should seek to lose my friendship by seeking to win my love.'

'Pardon me, my sweet and noble mistress,' said Tzitzis, humbly, but firmly; 'but the prince will never more woo thee. Thou wilt not reign a maiden princess. Who so worthy in all the empire as my lord of Cuiiri, who hath in his veins thy own imperial blood?'

'Thou art a good pleader for my lord, and he should be grateful to thee, girl,' said the princess, with a smile; 'but thou wilt plead in vain. Two days since, I might have listened to thee; for my thoughts have been much and kindly on this youthful noble. But thou art too late by a twelve-hour. Thou and he, sweet Tzitzis,' she said, playfully, 'are in conspiracy against me, I'll be sworn. He hath attacked without, and thou within. But I tell thee thou art both too late.'

The Peruvian maiden looked embarrassed, and then laughed to hide her confusion.

'I did not betray him, my princess,' she said, falteringly, looking timidly up.

'No, child, only by thy too great zeal. I do grieve for the noble lord, for I have high regard for him. A woman can but deeply feel for a generous heart that hath fallen back on itself, with hopes crushed and blighted. Alas! I know now that he loves. I can see, what before escaped me, that silent, deep, and devoted love prompted all his modest and retiring attentions, inspired his sweet verses, accompanied his gifts of flowers, and the thousand and one little kindnesses I have blindly been the object of. Alas, alas! how must his noble heart have been wounded by my indifference. I received all the tender, respectful homage he paid me, as if meant for the princess, and not for the woman. He was too modest a lover.'

'I would he had been bolder or less modest,' said the slave.

'He would have alarmed me then. As it was, I was free and unreserved with him, because I feared nothing.'

'He might, perhaps, by boldness, have won your heart,' ventured the maiden.

'Indeed, Tzitzis,' she said, laughing; 'I would not answer for it if he had been. But thou hast no need to instruct him in this lesson, child. I have now nothing but gratitude to give him.'

'Alas! the poor youth.'

'I do feel for him. He will think me cruel. But a princess hath not the command of her heart more than other maidens. To-day's events have clearly shown me that,' she added, with a heightened color.

The Peruvian surveyed her closely, and then said, with hesitation,

'If the lord of Cuiiri ask me what thou sayest of him —'

'Tell him the Princess Eylla did say he was the right hand of her throne,' she answered, with feeling and dignity. 'I shall hold an early conference with my lord touching some state affairs, in which I need his advice and counsel. Henceforth he must try and teach himself to look upon me as his princess. I do, from my soul, feel sorry his noble love should be no better met. But he hath sense and judgment, and I doubt not will subdue his hopeless passion.'

At this instant her eye fell on the sleeping maiden, and recollecting the flower she had placed in her bosom, she approached her, saying,

'It is near the time my gallant and princely wooer set to win my love to

him by this flower's aid. Let us see if it hath affected her aught in her sleep. Methinks, if it touched her dreams, and made her love Izcalli in them, she would wake.'

The princess approached, and knelt beside her as she spoke, and Tzitzis took her place near her. For a few moments, they watched her as she continued to sleep, with the deep and gentle respiration of an infant. The flower still lay there, like new fallen snow, upon her open bosom.

'It hath not harmed her. She sleeps like a child, that hath played itself weary. What is the time?'

'It hath been full ten minutes, your highness.'

'I will now take it from its sweet pillow, wake her, and see if the spell hath had its power. I do but have half faith in it, though I have heard of wondrous flowers with strange properties. There is one called, I think, the xical, that hath the power of bringing the dead to life, if held to the lips. There is another I have heard of called the otol, that hath some wondrous power, — I think, of death.

'Pray the gods this be not it,' cried the Peruvian, with anxiety.

'If it be, it at least hath failed to injure our sleepy Telitza, for the time is expired.'

With these words she bent over the maiden, and put forth her hand to remove the otol. As she did so, she thought she beheld the green and golden circle within it move and evolve, as if instinct with life. She looked a second time more closely, and then drew back her hand with an exclamation of surprise.

'Behold, Tzitzis! Do my own eyes deceive me?'

The Peruvian bent low over the flower, and the next moment started back with a cry of horror.

'It is a serpent, uncoiling itself.'

The princess, pale with fear and wonder, again looked into the flower, as it lay upon the gently rising and falling bosom of the Peruvian virgin, and did indeed, to her speechless horror and amazement, behold therein, instead of the beautiful little cup composed of minute concentric circles, a very small, slender serpent, with a needle-like tongue, moving within the petals with great rapidity. She perceived at once the fatal danger of the sleeper. But ere she could obey her first impulse to snatch the flower from her bosom, she saw the nimble little animal leave it for her breast, and thrice strike his stinging deep into the bosom that had warmed it into life.

The flower instantly withered, and the serpent itself, coiling its graceful length upon the bloodless and scarce visible wounds it had made, at the same instant expired. The sleeper waked not, but sighed heavily; — smiled most sweetly for a moment, as if in a pleasant passage of some happy dream. Then a fearful shudder passed over her frame, *and she was dead!*

The princess and her attendant looked on with silent horror. The blood chilled in their veins. For several minutes neither could move nor speak. At length the princess slowly rose to her feet. She spake not a word. But grief, wonder, indignation, horror, were depicted on her pale and rigid visage. She stood awhile after she rose, and contemplated the victim as she lay at her feet. She felt the hapless Telitza had died in her stead. She saw before her the death she herself had wonderfully escaped. Tzitzis cast herself upon the ground, dissolved in tears, and then lifted her hands to heaven in gratitude for the princess' safety. The princess' heart was full. Tears would have come to her relief, also, but for the just vengeance that burned

in her bosom against the assassin. She felt grateful for her preservation, but she expressed it only by a single, fervent, eloquent glance towards heaven. She felt that the present time was for action. She saw at a glance the whole dark plot of the prince, and at once decided on her course of conduct.

'Tzitzis!' she said, in a tone that startled the maiden for its stern decision, 'rise, and brush away thy tears. Haste to the Lord Cuiri, and bid him come hither speedily. Say not what hath been done. After thou hast given him the message, haste to the emperor, and desire him come to my chamber. Be speedy.'

When the Peruvian had left her alone, she strode the room with a firm, quick pace. Her brow and bearing were truly queenly, and the fierce fire of the haughty Aztec race flashed from her eyes, at other times so gentle. Her bosom heaved with strong feeling, such as woman only can show under excitement. Yet her firmly compressed mouth evinced the power she held over her emotions. In a few moments after the departure of Tzitzis, a quick step was heard without, followed instantly by a tap at the door, as if with the hilt of a sword.

'Come in,' she said, in an abrupt tone, that told of the energy of her feelings.

The lord of Cuiri threw open the door and stood upon the threshold. 'Pardon me, my noble mistress, but —'

'No apology, my lord — I have sent for you. Come hither. Nay — this is no time for ceremony. Look! What seest thou?' And she pointed to the body.

The young noble saw that the spirit of the princess was aroused; and, ignorant of the cause, half suspected it was against himself. He obeyed her, and approached the dead maiden. At first he thought she slept; but a second glance convinced him that it was the sleep of death. The withered flower, still lying on her bosom, at the same instant caught his eye.

'The otol!' he cried, with surprise; 'and therewith the fatal serpent!'

'What said you, my lord?' demanded the princess, quickly.

'I said I knew the flower. It is the otol. Surely, you could not have ordered this to be done?' he exclaimed, with surprise and amazement.

'No, my lord, no, no. 'Tis my princely cousin's handy work. He sent the flower as a gift to me, with the request that it should be worn in my bosom for his sake.'

'The prince!' repeated the astonished noble.

'None else. To prove if it possessed the love-inspiring virtue which my slave attributed to it, I tested it, as you see. Alas, poor Telitza! she shall be avenged. My lord of Cuiri, take with you such force as you will, and forthwith arrest the prince in his rooms.'

'Arrest the prince!' he exclaimed, starting.

'Do you hear me?' she repeated, commandingly, stamping her foot.

'It shall be done.'

'Delay not. Interchange no words with him. Reply to no questions he puts to you. Let it be done secretly, and without noise. Then return to me. Stay! Let not the Tlascalcan escape; I would have him also. Go, my lord.'

The nobleman immediately departed, and the princess was once more left alone.

'I did not believe the prince, — wicked at heart, ambitious in soul as I knew him to be, — would have attempted such a thing as this. This is the way he would *leap* into the throne. Pray the gods, he hath not laid his hands on my father's life!'

She hastened towards the door of her apartment, as if she would fly to his chamber to see if he were in safety, when it opened, and Tzitzis, pale and trembling, ushered in the emperor, wrapped in his silken night-robe.

'My child, what is this alarm?' he cried, on beholding her flushed and indignant bearing.

'I have sent for thee, my father,' she said, assuming a calmness that she was far from feeling, 'to ask thee if it is still thy purpose and wish that I should espouse the Prince Palipan, my cousin, and thy nephew?'

'Thou art a foolish child to call me hither at this hour to ask me what thou already knowest,' answered the emperor, displeased.

'Sit here, my father. I have a deeper reason than you conceive or scarcely will believe, when you come to know it, for sending for thee at this time. Nay — sit by me and hear me.'

'We are not alone,' said the emperor, struck by her impressive manner and deep voice of feeling.

'Tzitzis, child, retire to thy couch, if thou canst sleep. Be secret, as I have told thee, as to what thou hast seen. Nay, further, regard not the slave upon the floor, she sleeps too heavily to hear or heed.' 'What wouldst thou say, my child? Thou art not well. Something hath disturbed thee.'

'My father,' she said, without regarding his words, 'dost thou remember, in the history of your imperial line, there was an emperor who had twin sons?'

'I do. It was Acolhuatzin the Great, my seventh ancestor.'

'Which of those sons did he decree should possess his throne?'

'Both to be emperors equally.'

'Such was his decree; but what was the truth? Did not one twin, more ambitious than his brother, secretly slay him, that he might reign alone?'

'This is true, my child. But wherefore these questions?'

'Did he reign?' she asked, pointedly.

'No. The emperor slew him for the murder, and gave the throne to the heir of another branch.'

'Did the emperor well in slaying his own son?'

'All men have applauded his justice.'

'Wouldst thou have done the same, my father, had he been thy son?'

'Yes, child,' he said, sternly; 'though thou thyself should have pleaded with tears for his life.'

'This is what I wish to know,' she said, with spirit, her eye lighting up with a smile of satisfaction.

'But what has this to do with the prince?'

'Thou knowest we had some difference the early part of the evening, and so parted.'

'Well.'

'An hour since he sent me, by my Peruvian slave, in this alabaster vase, a tall and stately flower.'

'He hath, then, come to his senses,' said the monarch, pleased. 'Thou didst accept it?'

'Truly, father, I held the prince in little favor. Nevertheless, I admired this flower, but with suspicion. So I questioned the maiden closely, and she said the prince bade her, after I slept, place it within my breast, saying, withal, some pretty speech about its coldness towards him.' of what kind you know not. But I thought it was a gift from the prince. Truly, he was not far wrong, girl.'

'Listen, my father. Suspicion grew on me still, strengthened by more I heard; and, ere I took the flower to my own heart, as the prince desired, I laid it first upon the warm breast of yonder sleeping slave.'

'Well, my child, well,' cried the emperor, with both alarm and curiosity united by her words and manner.

'Come hither, sire, and let the prince's gift tell the remainder of the tale.'

She led the monarch towards the dead body of the Peruvian slave, and silently pointed to her bosom. It was already livid, and the flower and the serpent lay upon it.

'She is dead!' exclaimed the emperor.

'She is poisoned, sir,' said the princess, impressively. 'There lies thy nephew's gift, where, a quarter of an hour since, I laid it. It is an omen.'

The emperor gazed fixedly upon the corpse for awhile, without a word. He then turned, and cast himself upon his daughter's neck.

'Thank the gods thou art saved, my child.'

'I thank them,' she said, fervently, 'not that I am saved from death, but from the prince.'

'He shall die!' cried the monarch, in a severe and terrible tone.

'Nay, father. Let not his blood be shed. My life hath not been taken. Let him live, though in the lowest dungeons of the imperial castle.'

'His life must answer it,' replied the emperor, resolutely. 'His head shall roll on the scaffold at sunrise.'

'My dear father, hear me,' she cried, detaining him as he was going out. 'So soon as I saw the fatal effects of the flower upon the slave, I despatched Tzitzis for the young Lord Cuiri, and, showing him what thou hast now seen, commanded him secretly to arrest the prince in his chamber.'

'Didst thou this? Then art thou a noble girl.'

'By this time he is a prisoner. Now, my dear father, leave his punishment to me. It will be the deeper and savor, if I am his judge. Let it not be made a public matter. There are the seeds of dissension now abroad, and the people, and even certain disaffected nobles, taking advantage of division in the imperial family, might shake the state and endanger its stability.'

'By the eagle of Aztec, girl,' said the monarch, embracing her; 'you speak well and wisely. I feel I shall leave behind me a wise successor, even though she be the last of her line.'

'Let the prince be my prisoner, my father. I sent to arrest him ere I asked your permission, lest you might take some dangerous step. Now that you have sanctioned it, place confidence in me, that I shall, in the disposition of him, do nothing that will not also meet with your approval.'

'You are a noble woman, and I knew not what excellence I was sacrificing when I would have given you to this assassin,' said the emperor, with pride and paternal feeling. 'But we must trust to the gods to provide for the continuance of our empire.'

'Thou dost remember, father,' said the princess, with a smile, and some slight tokens of confusion, 'the prophecy that is to be fulfilled in a female heir to the throne of the Aztecs?'

'I do. And by the glory of the Aztec dynasty!' cried the monarch, warmly and sincerely; 'I should rather you would wed and take to your throne the lowest serf from the people, than that this false-prince should have espoused you.'

The Princess Eylla looked in her father's face for a moment after he had ceased speaking, with unmixed surprise and delight, — then flung herself impulsively into his arms, and wept upon his shoulder.

The emperor would have questioned her for the cause of this singular exhibition of feeling; but she gently and skillfully avoided an explanation of emotions she scarcely dared to give herself up to even when alone. Having given orders for the body of the ill-fated maiden to be privately removed from the apartments and from the palace, she then obeyed the emperor's commands to remove from the scene of death to a suite of apartments adjoining his own, and which had once been occupied by her mother. The windows of these chambers commanded a wider view of the city and canal than those which she had left, and the lattice in the sleeping-room of the empress opened upon a balcony of stone, that directly overhung the water. Hither she followed the emperor, and with Tzitzis, awaited the return of the Lord Cuiri to communicate to her the intelligence of the arrest of the prince.

MONTEZUMA, THE SERF;
OR THE
REVOLT OF THE MEXITILI :
A T A L E
OF THE
LAST DAYS OF THE AZTEC DYNASTY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
'LAFITTE,' 'KYD,' 'BURTON,' 'THE QUADROONE,' ETC.

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CHAPTER I.

SCENE IN THE ARMORY.

WHILE these events were transpiring within the palace, scenes of an opposite character were opening in the net-maker's quarter, and the neighborhood of the street of the Armorers. In a few minutes after parting with Casipeti at the palace-stairs, Montezuma landed on the opposite shore, at the foot of his own street. He entered his dwelling, to see if by chance any of his friends were there, and to leave a word of warning with Fatziza. He then hastened towards the arsenal, which Sismarqui had been ordered to seize, and the garrison of which his brother, who was one of the soldiers, had succeeded in corrupting. This he felt was the most important point to visit first, as it contained nearly all the weapons with which the revolvers were to arm themselves.

As the young man, whose destinies had been so singularly unfolded within the last few hours, hastened along the narrow and winding street that led towards it, his mind was agitated with the most restless thoughts upon the situation in which he had placed himself, through his newly-awakened passion for the princess. The reality of the scenes he had so recently passed through,—the bold declaration he had made of his devotion,—her confession of love in return,—all seemed improbable, all seemed to him a wonderful, delightful, overwhelming dream! Could it be that the adoring, distant admiration he had felt for the lovely princess from boyhood, contained really the germ of love, and that that germ had now matured and become a glorious fruit-bearing tree! Could it be, that his reverential homage to his future empress, whenever she appeared abroad, was love unknown to him,—love under the guise of an enthusiastic bondman's reverential fealty? It was all indeed true. Montezuma had loved long without knowing it, and now that the key of the knowledge of his own heart had been given him by the princess' own hand, he could not but acknowledge her long-existing power over it. He now, therefore, wore love's cuirass lightly and familiarly on his heart in that love had so well taught him how to wear it. With the deepest gratitude, and a calm, inward sense of joy, that only favored lovers like him can feel, he hastened on his way towards the armory, resolved, for her sake, to avert the storm he had raised, if in the power of human means. But he felt he had only human means with which to encounter excited human passions, and the reflection made him tremble for the issue. Nevertheless, his bold spirit quailed not, and his love for the princess made him feel the presence within him of a power almost godlike in its energies.

As he approached the armory, the sounds of deep voices which had reached his ear on the water, like the noise of distant surges breaking upon the shore, became suddenly loud and decided. He quickened his pace, and soon came

in sight of the arsenal. At a glance he saw that the impatient multitude already filled the close street beneath the arch, and that the throng extended several hundred yards on either side. He had already suspected something like this, from the deserted state of the net-maker's street and those alleys through which he had come, which before his visit to the palace seemed alive with men passing from house to house, standing together in anxious groups, or sitting in their shop-doors burnishing up their rude arms. He flew forward, and was pressing through their midst towards the armory, to prevent, if possible, its falling into their possession, when Hucha, the Hunchback, caught him by the scarf, with an exclamation of joy.

'The gods have answered my prayer! Thou art here.'

At this instant the revolvers sent up a deep, stern shout, and the multitude swayed this way and that, like a vast wave.

'What means this?' asked Montezuma, sternly. 'Tis not the hour for action! This is madness, if ye had hoped to succeed.'

'The people are impatient for their arms, and dropping in hither in small parties by different streets, have insensibly increased to the multitude you behold. But Sismarqui holds the armory, and though they have thrice assailed its gates, refuses to open them till the signal is given from the temple.'

'Sismarqui hath behaved nobly, Hucha. Come with me.'

With these words, Montezuma forced his way through the townsmen, who, on recognizing, greeted him with acclamations, and made way for him and the Hunchback to approach quite up to the arch of the armory. Above it was a terrace, on which stood Sismarqui in full armor, attended by his gigantic brother and Inisquini, the sword-maker, also clothed in strong mail, and leaning upon a huge sword with which he was armed.

'You are most welcome, Montezuma,' he said, on discerning him. 'We have had to hold at bay our own party for their overmuch zeal.'

'I would come up to you,' said Montezuma, 'having a matter of deep moment to communicate. Open the gate!'

'The people will take possession of the armory, if I do.'

'My friends,' said Montezuma, turning towards them, and speaking with gentle firmness, 'this rude bearing grieves me! This spirit is not the kind that will better our condition. Patriots who begin by insubordination among themselves, will never be successful, and their course must end in direct anarchy. The gates of the armory are now to be opened for me to enter. Will you permit me to go in with Hucha?'

'Open the gates to our brave chief! His will is our will. Long live Montezuma!' were the replies that rose from a thousand voices.

As the gate was opened, the populace retired from it, leaving a large space before them, and the two entered without hindrance, and closed the gate behind them. On reaching the balcony, Montezuma took Sismarqui, Hucha, and the sword-maker into a guard-room adjoining it, and closed the door. His manner prepared them for some important communication, and they waited in silence for him to unfold his purpose in seeking an interview with them. After a few moment's delay, during which he paced the room as if troubled how to open his communication, he turned abruptly to them and said,

'My brave friends, this revolt must not go on!'

'The three insurgent chiefs started with astonishment, and looked upon each other, to see if all had heard aright.

'I repeat it, my friends. The insurrection must be stayed. At whatever cost, it must be stayed!'

'What mean these strange words, Montezuma?' demanded Sismarqui. Art thou mad?'

'No.'

'Art thou a traitor?' cried the sword-maker, grasping firmly the hilt of his weapon, and fixing upon him a penetrating glance of suspicion.

'No.'

'Then thou art a coward,' cried the Hunchback, with a contemptuous glance and a bitter sneer on his expressive lip.

'My friends and brothers, I am neither,' answered the young man, calmly. 'Hear me a few words. Our wrongs have kindled this flame of rebellion in the city. We have taken arms to retrieve our condition, and from slaves to become freemen. We are now the property of the emperor and his nobles, articles of barter and sale, — holders neither of our lives, of our honor, or of worldly wealth. All we have and are belongs to our masters. Is it not so?'

'You speak the truth,' answered the sword-maker, in a harsh tone, as if this recapitulation of his condition had stirred from the depths of his soul all the bitterness of his spirit against his oppressors.

'It is, then, that we may break these chains of vassalage, and become freemen, that we are in arms, — not that we may slay or make slaves of the nobles, and place ourselves in their stead. Our object is not anarchy, but order, — not bloodshed, but benevolence, — not war, but peace.'

'Yes,' answered Sismarqui, who had listened to his friend's words with surprise, and vain conjectures as to their drift; 'Yes, if peace, benevolence, and order may be achieved without their opposites. If freedom and all the blessings of a healthy human liberty could be ours without striking a blow, then would I be the first to sheathe the sword I have drawn this night.'

'Is such your opinion, Inisquini?' demanded Montezuma, with a kindling eye, of the stern old sword-maker.

'The gods know, I have no ambition in my old age, to win honor through blood. I have taken my sword to break the chains worn by my country.'

'If the emperor would remove those chains, would you put up your sword, nor seek to shed his blood and that of his nobles?' inquired Montezuma, eagerly.

'I would. But there is little hope of this,' answered the old man, shaking his head.

'What say you, my brave Hucha?'

'The sword is drawn, and will never be laid down until the tyrant lays down his sceptre, or it is wrested from his grasp,' answered the young insurgent leader, almost fiercely.

'Thou knowest in a few days, Hucha,' said Montezuma, without appearing to regard the tone of his words, 'that by our laws the emperor will resign his crown to his daughter.'

'To the more refined tyrant, prince Palipan,' answered the Hunchback, with a dark frown.

'Mark me!' said Montezuma, impressively, fixing his eyes upon their faces, 'prince Palipan will never wield the sceptre of his uncle Ulyd.'

'Hath he been assassinated?' cried Sismarqui, which the decided and certain tones of his friend led him at once to suspect.

'No; unless that he hath slain himself. The princess hath this night dismissed him from her presence in high displeasure, and signified to her father her firm determination never to espouse him.'

'How know you this?' they all demanded in one breath.

'I will tell thee, briefly. The princess privately sent for me, an hour since, to —'

'Knew she of this conspiracy, then?' asked Hucha, quickly.

'She knows it all,' answered Montezuma, evasively; 'how, thou shalt hear another time. I confessed myself its leader, in our interview, and she implored me by the gods and by her regard for the people, and theirs for her, to use my influence to stop its further progress. She bade me say that the prince should never rule, and that whatever we desired, for whatsoever we were about to take up arms, she would grant, the day she became empress. She implored me not to deluge her empire in blood, and to promise, in her name, to the people, more than all that steel could win.'

'This is marvellous,' said the sword-maker, thoughtfully.

'What said you?' demanded Sismarqui, with the deepest interest.

'That if she would give me some token, to convince the citizens of my truth, and as a surety of her promise, I would sacrifice myself but that I would obey her will.'

With these words he exhibited the signet which the princess had given him.

'And you promised!' said Hucha, who had steadily all the while watched the face of the young man, with a singularly penetrating gaze.

'I then swore by the sacred gods and the imperial eagle of her house, that I would stay the revolt, or perish a sacrifice to the fearful spirit I had raised!'

For a few moments there was a dead silence among the listeners. The old chief leaned upon his sword, thoughtfully, with his eyes fixed upon the floor. Sismarqui stood with his arms folded upon his breast, looking upon his friend with more of displeasure than approval; while the Hunchback walked slowly away to the opposite side of the room, as if seeking to conceal from every eye the effect, whatever it was, that Montezuma's words had upon him.

'How is this?' at length said Montezuma, looking round from one to the other; 'am I to believe that you joined in this revolt for the sake of bloodshed, or from a more evil motive still, guilty ambition? Why do I find you grieved that the diamond you would seek with years of labor in the deep mine, is found in your very path? What seek ye more?'

'My noble friend and brother,' said Sismarqui, taking his hand, 'your judgment in all things should be my guide. It has been so, from my youth. Your words convey joy to my bosom; but I have been silent because I doubt.

'Not my word?'

'No; nor the princess' promise. But I fear when she becomes empress of the realm, and the sole power is in her own hands, she will be dazzled by it, and either forget or repent of what she has now promised so fairly. I might say, if I could find one hundred golden *xiquepilli* to-morrow, I would give fifty to the first man I met, yet should be very reluctant when I had found the sum, to fulfil my promise. Doubtless the sweet princess speaks as her heart dictates. But she has not been *tried*.'

'Sismarqui speaks with wisdom,' said the sword-maker; 'he has expressed my thoughts. If my life would make the good princess happier than she is, methinks I would willingly give it. But our country looks to us for liberty.'

'And they shall have it,' cried the Hunchback, in a loud voice, coming forward. 'The princess Eylla hath not so devout a worshipper of her heart's virtues and her person's charms, as the accursed Hunchback, whom she can scarce look upon without contempt. But the princess hath neither virtues nor charms enough to make a traitor of me.'

'Traitor, to me!' repeated Montezuma, laying his hand upon his weapon. But he instantly withdrew it, and looked as if more grieved than offended.

'I repeat it, — *traitor*! She hath sent for thee, bearing somehow, (the gods know if otherwise than through thyself,) that we were on the eve of revolt, and hath so won thee by flattery and fallacious promises that thou hast come back hither ready to sell thy country! By the bright sun! I will go forth and proclaim thee traitor to the people, that they may reek their swords in the false heart that would betray them!'

He advanced towards the door as he ended, when Sismarqui stepped before him.

'Nay, Hucha! This is madness. I am, perhaps, as little favorable as myself to this subversion of our bright plan of revolt on the uncertain tenure of the princess' promise.'

'Stand aside, Sismarqui,' answered the young man with gloomy fierceness; 'unless thou dost wish a quarrel with me, which on another matter than this I would freely engage in with thee.'

He struck him back with the flat of his sword, as he spoke. The blood of the young armorer leaped to his cheek, and the next instant both would have been engaged in hostile conflict with each other, when both Montezuma and the old chief arrested their weapons.

'Shame!' cried the latter, with stern displeasure, 'would you draw your swords first upon each other? Fie upon thee, Hucha! If such be your temper, little good will come of our taking up arms. If you love your country truly, and would free her from bondage, put up thy weapon. Sismarqui return thine to its scabbard. Listen to me, both of ye!'

The momentary irritation of the irascible dwarf had been vented in his blow upon the breast of Sismarqui, and ashamed that he had let passion and also private feeling take the place of reason and zeal for the public good, he silently obeyed the old chief, and stood with a pale cheek and his eyes cast upon the ground awaiting his words. Sismarqui betrayed no trace of anger or resentment, and seemed to think only of the present crisis of affairs.

'There remains but one course to pursue,' said the old chief; 'either insurrection with a firm trust in our good swords, or endurance with faith in the princess Eylla's promise. Both results are equally uncertain, and both equally favor our object.'

'Not so, Inisquini,' interrupted Montezuma, and speaking with respectful earnestness. 'We *may* fail to achieve our liberties with our swords, — we are sure of them when the princess comes to the throne.'

'I am willing to resign my opinion and be guided by you,' answered the old man. 'I feel that you are a better judge of the sincerity of the princess than we can be, as you saw her and heard her speak.'

Montezuma warmly grasped the sword-maker's hand, and then turned inquiringly to Sismarqui.

'I will also wait the princess' promise,' said the young armorer; 'if then it fail, it will be time enough to resort to arms.'

'And by that time the wily woman will have strengthened every post, fortified every garrison, trebly manned the walls and bridges, and riveted our chains so firmly on, that we may not rend them off our limbs but with all our lives,' answered Hucha. 'No, no! We possess the arsenal with its fifty men-at-arms, and this step alone has given us the command of an eighth of the city.'

'Wherefore, brave Hucha,' said Montezuma, kindly and reprovingly,

'wherefore this turbulent will in opposition to your friends? Thou hast, like ourselves, boldly declared thyself a lover of liberty. Will she be more welcome to thee that she comes in garments dyed in blood, or less so that she is presented to thee by the hand of the princess? Nay, nay, my friend, thou hast forgotten thyself for a moment. Give me thy hand.'

'Montezuma,' said Hucha, steadily and calmly, 'I will not give thee my hand. Thou hast been corrupted by the fair words of a woman, and art unworthy the confidence of men. Have thou and thy friends thy own way. I wash my hands of this matter altogether. If ye choose to continue slaves, *I will be free!*'

With these words, he threw himself forward upon the point of his sword, forgetful of the corslet he had put on. The blade broke short against his steel-covered breast, and he fell heavily upon his face to the floor. He rose slowly and silently, and turning his head towards the wall, burst into tears.

Montezuma was touched by the keen sensibility of the nervous dwarf, the violent expressions of whose feelings were not new to him, and approached him.

Hucha! he said in a low tone, 'I know you have a deep and secret grief at heart, which embitters all your spirit, and that you had hoped in the excitement of battles and conquest to fly from your own soul. If my sister hath chosen differently than you could have her, I am sorry for you, and she herself sympathizes with you. There are a thousand fairer and kinder maids than Fatziza in Mexico. We have discoursed before upon this subject, and therefore I speak freely to you now.'

The dwarf did not return the pressure of the hand Montezuma placed in his, and walked away from him without speaking.

'How shall we move the people to our new purpose?' said Sismarqui, as Montezuma came forward; 'and how the garrison?' 'T will be harder putting this down than carrying it on, methinks.'

'Leave the people to me. Go, Sismarqui, and tell thy brother secretly that the conspiracy is discovered, and must end where it is, and bid the soldiers return to their duty.'

'The armorer's street is filled with the populace receiving arms,' said the sword-maker; 'I will fly thither, and disperse them, if possible.'

'Proclaim the princess' promise, and appeal to their love for her. On my life, it will act upon them.'

Sismarqui and the old chief left the apartment together, and Montezuma once more stepped up to the Hunchback.

'Hucha, I am grieved at this manner. Join thy voice with ours, and let us show our love to our country and to the princess by both doing this noble service.'

'Montezuma,' said Hucha, turning and fixing full upon him his glittering eyes, 'I tell thee thou art a traitor.'

Montezuma started, colored, and was silent. His conscience smote him. He felt he was in truth acting more for the princess than for his fellow-bondmen. His glance fell beneath the penetrating eye of the Hunchback, and at the moment he asked himself if he did not merit the appellation. At length he said, quietly,

'Hucha, I forgive you.'

'Montezuma, truth needs it not,' said Hucha, with sarcasm. 'Your countenance hath been an open scroll for me to read, and when I was at fault for the beginning or ending of a line, I had but to use my ear, which ever

caught, unflinching, from your lips, the catch-word, "princess Eylla." *She* princess hath used her beauty as a net, and caught you in it. *Ala thou!* thy ambition should have so blinded thee as to let thee fall into it! *Marry me!* the princess will rivet firmer the chains that bind her vassals; and then look out for thy own head! *I forgive thee*, for thou needest it. I pity thee, for thou dost surely merit it!

It would be difficult to describe the inimitable irony of voice and manner with which the Hunchback uttered these words. When he had ended, he turned away from Montezuma and left the guard-room.

CHAPTER II

THE SERF-CHIEF AND THE INSURGENTS.

THE multitude without had been long expecting the re-appearance of their leaders, when the sword-maker appeared at the gate, on his way out of the arsenal. When he came forth into the crowd, he said,

'My friends and fellow-bondmen, our liberties are nearer and surer than we hoped. Whatever Montezuma suggest to you, I pray you all submit to. The fair princess Eylla hearing of our desire to free ourselves from her father's oppression, hath sent us a fair message of terms.'

'What terms?' asked one of the crowd, as the sword-maker was making his way along through their midst.

'Terms better than we can win by our swords, and without bloodshed!'

'Long live the princess!' shouted many of the multitude, enthusiastically, while others cried sternly,

'What power hath the princess? Prince Palipan is to be our ruler. She hath no voice, masters, when once he gets into the throne.'

'True, true! No princess,—no terms!' cried the fickle multitude.

'The prince will never rule Mexico with her consent,' answered the sword-maker, still moving on.

'Nor is it with her consent she marries him, if all tales be true,' said the first speaker.

'She will never marry the prince,' said the old chief, decidedly. 'But yonder is Montezuma. I do pray you, my friends, listen to him with peaceably-disposed minds.'

The sword-maker then pursued his way towards the armorer's quarter, while Montezuma himself appeared on the balcony above the arch. His presence was hailed with a shout, and every eye was turned towards him.

'My friends,' he cried, you have known me from my youth upward, and you have this night sealed your confidence in me by constituting me with one voice the leader of this movement to assert our civil rights. Have you still confidence in me, that I will do nothing that will have a tendency to bring evil upon you?'

There was but one voice from a thousand tongues, 'Live Montezuma! We will follow him to the death!'

'Your object,' he then said, in a loud, clear voice, 'in rising in arms, is to free yourselves from attachment to the soil, and to the nobles who hold it, — to break the bond that binds you as fixtures to a street or estate belonging to a noble or the emperor, — to release your persons, lands, and goods from longer being the property of your lords.'

'Yes, yes!' was the unanimous response of the multitude.

'It is, also, that you may no longer be subject to be chastised or maimed by men who hold you as their property, — that the fine on the marriage of your females may be done away, — that the chastity of your wives and daughters may be protected and secured, that your feelings as men may be respected, and that the power of life and death shall be lodged only in the hands of the emperor. Is it not so?'

There was again a loud exclamation in the affirmative; but one or two voices from beneath the arch cried, 'No emperor!'

'No emperor, indeed, but an empress, good as she is lovely,' said Montezuma, quickly. 'The princess Eylla will soon become empress of the realm. She has long felt for your oppression, and grieved that she could not relieve you. How often she has interceded with the emperor for the innocent, you can all bear testimony. She will shortly have the power in her own hands, and will then exert it for our benefit.'

'The prince, the prince!' cried several persons, in disapproving tones.

'The prince Palipan hath this night been dismissed by the princess, with her final answer, that she will never espouse him, but ascend the throne herself sole empress.'

There was a loud simultaneous shout from the multitude, the same which had reached the prince's ears as he was then standing beneath the balcony of the net-maker's house. When it had ceased, Montezuma was about to continue, when one of the artificers in the crowd asked, abruptly,

'How know you this, sir chief?'

'From her own lips. She sent for me but a little while since, and made this communication, desiring me to convey it to you. She promises, through me, that if you will return to your abodes peaceably, she will grant you, on ascending the throne, all which you would now demand of her by force of arms. Not one grievance is there you would redress, and which I have just enumerated, that she will not at once do away with. She throws herself upon your generosity, and implores you to subdue this spirit of revolt, and receive from her hands the heavenly gift of freedom.'

'What said you? What did you?' asked several, eagerly.

'I knelt at her feet, and swore that I would, if my life were the forfeit, seek to carry out her wishes. It remains for us now to deluge our fair city in blood, fighting for a liberty we may never gain, consigning our abodes and wives and children to the fires of universal conflagration and the reeking steel of an infuriated soldiery, or lay aside our swords, and wait seven days, to receive in peace the certain liberty she offers.'

A deep murmur ran among the multitude at these words of their leader, and for a moment he was unable to decide in what way they had been received. At length it began to grow louder and more marked, and he saw with pleasure that the desired effect had been produced.

'Now, my friends, let us retire to our homes, and wait patiently the issue of events. Not a blow has yet been struck! though nothing evil can come of this, if you soon retire. The garrison of the arsenal have returned to their duty, alarmed that the knowledge of our intentions had reached the

salute. Let each man seek to spread the intelligence of peace, and sow its seed wherever his footsteps take him. Long live princess Eylla and liberty !'

'Long live the empress !' was the loud response of the multitude.

Instantly they began to disperse by the different streets, and in less than five minutes the Street of the Arch contained but two or three solitary individuals. Montezuma then turned from the balcony, and met the fraternal embrace of Sismarqui.

'This is beyond my hopes,' said the latter.

'The people, though slaves, love their homes and families,' said Montezuma, 'and if liberty can be achieved without endangering them, they will choose it. Besides, I counted much on their attachment to the princess, and I am not disappointed.'

'The name of the princess Eylla is a talisman to every Mexitlian heart,' said Sismarqui, with enthusiasm. 'Her presence in the midst of the revolt, had it come to blows, would have suspended even the contest. Thank the gods, she hath cast off this prince.'

Montezuma had stronger reasons for gratitude than his friend, but was silent. Words would but faintly express what *he* felt in a matter in which his heart was so deeply interested.

'How took thy brother the announcement, said you ?' he asked quickly.

'Not kindly at first, but at length yielded. The garrison were more difficult to bring over, inasmuch as they feared for their heads. But I convinced them that they were yet safe,—that their defection had not yet transpired, and that, if they chose, they might hold me prisoner in testimony of their loyalty. This they would have done, but for my brother. They are now on duty again, but are a little sullen. Their officer is willing to throw himself on the clemency of the emperor.'

'Did he join us with the soldiers ? I thought he was to be placed under arrest.'

'He loves Casipeti's pretty daughter, and resentment against the noble who insulted her in the square, and for which her father struck him, induced him, he says, to side with us. He thinks the course we are now pursuing the safest and wisest.'

'I feel that it will be. May he prove true ! But I doubt the noble's faith ! Half my task is not yet accomplished. My party of brave young men in the street leading to the Temple of War, and who were to seize it with me, are yet to be seen,—but I have only to speak, and they will do as I desire. Then the quarter of the Lapidaries and my brave knight must be visited. It is near twelve, and they will be in arms, and mischief will be done, ere we can reach them.

It was decided that Sismarqui should go to the street of the armorers, and assist Inisquini, the sword-maker, in suppressing the spirit of revolt in that quarter, and from thence proceed to the foot of the hill of the Temple, to disperse the band Montezuma had directed to meet him there ; while the latter should hasten to the ruined palace of Axusco, and with the knight and such chiefs as might have assembled, go forward to the Lapidaries' quarter.

The two young men then retired from the balcony into a circular stone hall above the arch, from which a flight of steps wound downward to the area enclosed by the gates. They were about to descend, when four of the soldiers, with their weapons drawn in their hands, stepped before Montezuma, and arrested his progress, by leveling their pikes at his breast.

'What means this ?' he demanded.

'That we have forfeited our heads, if our participation in this affair you set on foot reaches the emperor's ears,' replied one of the men boldly.

'What is your purpose in arresting me?'

'To deliver you, as the leader of the rebellion, to the emperor, as the price of our own liberty and forfeited lives.'

'Ye are foolish, men-at-arms,' said Sismarqui, sternly; 'Montezuma's person cannot be of any avail for your safety. If you will have a victim, take me, and release him; — I am equally guilty, — nay, more so, for I was the chief rebel here until he came.'

'Let him give us some surety of safety, and he shall go,' said one of the soldiers, for several other men-at-arms had by this time gathered round the young men.

Montezuma had made no resistance, nor betrayed any emotion the while, trusting by exercising moderation, sooner to escape from his unpleasant situation. As the soldier spoke, he recollected the signet of the princess. He felt for their situation, feeling he had contributed mainly to place them in it. He therefore resolved to part with it, to re-assure them.

'My brave fellows,' he said, 'here is the signet of the princess Eylla, which she placed in my hands, to show to her subjects in testimony of the truth of the message I have borne to them. This will protect you, should the displeasure of the emperor menace you. The signet of the princess is held by him as sacred as his own.'

As he spoke he placed it in the hands of the men-at-arms, who had demanded some security or token of protection. The soldiers examined it, passing it from one to the other, with many exclamations of surprise at its rare beauty. It bore a representation of the Aztec eagle floating with outspread wings in the sun, and beneath it the name, 'Eylla,' encircled by a virgin zone.

'We will take this,' said the soldiers, 'and return it to the princess, when she ascends the throne, — for then we shall not fear for our safety. You may pass forth.'

They were then permitted to descend and pass out of the gates into the close street. Here they separated, as they had previously agreed, Montezuma going in the direction of the ruined palace, and Sismarqui proceeding towards the street of the armorers. He had proceeded beyond the arch but a few steps, when two men, hitherto concealed in the shadow of the wall along which he was walking, stepped forth in his path and confronted him. He started back, and stood in an attitude of defence.

'Sismarqui,' said a voice he thought he well knew, 'we have been waiting for thee to come forth. We were told thou wert in knights' armor, and thus knew thee.'

'I shall soon doff it.'

'We are well met, Hopo, if you seek me; — who is this with thee?'

'I am Harani, the boatman,' answered the other.

'What do you wish with me? Time presses!' he said, hurriedly.

'A sad tale, I fear me, master Sismarqui.'

'Speak; what is it?'

'As we were rowing our boat along the gardens, to land at the net-maker's street,' said Hopo, the fisherman, 'we saw one of the emperor's white swan-boats lying close in with the alcatl trees that overhang the water. To escape observation, we instantly pulled into the land. We had been there but a few minutes, when we heard a shriek —'

'Well, well! what is it?' demanded Sismarqui, half guessing at the truth.

'I thought you looked alarmed,' said the waterman, apologetically.

'Wilt thou torture me?'

'The shriek,' said Harani, 'was from a female whom we saw taken from the balcony of Mahco, the net-maker's house, by a cavalier, who, with the aid of a man-at-arms, bore her to their boat.'

'Well — well.'

'The boat then put off, and swiftly crossed the canal. We followed at a distance, and saw it land at the palace-stairs, near the marble tower, where the lemon-walk terminates.'

Sismarqui scarcely heard the remainder of the communication. He felt a sensation of dizziness, and staggered against the wall.

'Was it — was — was —' he faintly articulated; 'did — did you see her? Was it Fatziza?'

'It was,' said Hopo. 'We saw her face by the light of the moon. She had fainted, we thought.'

'How long since this happened?'

'But twenty minutes since. We are just from the palace.'

The lover was for a moment longer overpowered by the suddenness of the appalling intelligence; but at length he succeeded by a strong mental effort in recovering himself. If his deep emotion had been a mantle, to have been laid aside, he could not have divested himself of it more completely than he did.

'Come with me,' he said, in a deep, rigid tone of voice, that permitted no question.

The men followed his long, rapid strides towards the net-maker's, without speaking. He moved swiftly forward, without having formed in his mind any definite purpose or mode of action. Fatziza was torn from him by some reckless knight of the emperor's court, and it was enough to set on fire every feeling in his bosom, and spur him forward! He thought of going at once to the palace, and alone to attempt her rescue. He thought of an appeal to the princess! A thousand different modes of conduct in the emergency occurred to his mind, as he hastened onward through the narrow streets, but he rejected each as it suggested itself, for others equally unsatisfactory. In this irresolute state of mind, and in a condition bordering on phrenzy, he reached the net-maker's house. As if to assure himself that all was not a dream, he threw himself against the door, and burst it open. In an instant he was in her little room. It was deserted. He flew to her brothers. The window was thrown open, and the moonlight streamed in broadly upon the floor. No one was there!

'Fatziza,' he cried, as if he hoped yet to hear her sweet, familiar voice in reply.

All was silent. An object on the floor arrested his eyes. He took it up, and held it in the moonlight. It was a knight's plume. He examined it closer. It was black, and a diamond button was attached to it. His face became deadly pale, while his eye brightened up with settled vengeance.

'I am no longer at a loss who hath done this,' he said within his closed teeth. 'This is a feather from the wing of the imperial eagle. None but the Aztec princes wear such a plume! I know where to direct my vengeance! My thoughts were upon the knight, whom I unhorsed, — but — this knight may have been the prince. By the gods! now I call to mind his bearing, it was he! I will seek her, and rescue, or die with her!'

On the railing of the balcony he also saw a fragment of the *huepilli*, or fillet, that had tied her hair, and on bounding forward with mingled rage and grief to seize and press it to his heart, he beheld the prince's cloak, which he had thrown down upon the balcony. Its clasp, with the eagle upon it, and its green color, confirmed his suspicions. At this instant the net-maker entered the room in great terror, and on beholding before him a man in complete knight's armor of the richest description, for such had been Sismarqui's costume since he so suddenly made his appearance in it at the meeting of the conspirators in the room below, he started back with additional terror.

'Fear not, Mahco! I am Sismarqui. I broke into thy dwelling to see if the rumor that reached my ears were true!'

'What rumor? Where is Fatziza, son?'

'She hath been torn from thy roof, old man,' he said sternly, 'by a recreant villain!'

'Fatziza! my child, borne from me!'

'Too true, father! I go to rescue her.'

'Fly, fly! may the gods aid thee! Alas, my child! my daughter! Would to the gods I had died ere I saw this day!' cried the bereaved net-maker, sinking upon the floor.

'Father,' said Sismarqui, 'if Montezuma come hither, tell him I have gone to rescue his sister, and bid him look to his country. Ha! he speaks not! The pulse hath fled! It hath killed him! Here is sorrow, twice told! The gods receive thy spirit, father!'

With these words he rushed from the chamber, bearing the old man, slain by the shock of his sudden and deep grief. Before gaining the street, nay, on finding the plume and cloak, he had decided on the course he should pursue to attempt Fatziza's rescue.

'Hopo, and you, Harani, my kind friends, I pray you add to your kindness to-night a further favor. Take me in your boat, presently, and land me at the palace-stairs, where thou sawest this cavalier himself land.'

'We will do it, master,' said Hopo, promptly. 'Wilt thou go to the palace in thy knight's armor?' asked Harani.

'If I would play among serpents, I must choose their scaly covering,' answered he, as he stepped into their rude boat. 'Delay not, but shoot out into the stream. Thy nimblest oar will scarcely keep pace with my impatience.'

'I do hope thou wilt recover her, master Sismarqui,' said Hopo, as he bent with his comrade to their slender oars, and impelled their little bark swiftly across the bright water; 'but when these nobles have a mind to wickedness, 't is a hard matter for poor bondmen like us to stay them!'

'Poor maiden! she was the loveliest flower in our vale of Alcolo,' said Harani, with that simple poetry of expression which characterized the Mexitili; 'and then her voice, as she screamed, was so sweet and mournful, just as I have heard the golden-winged *quiltototl*, when pierced by the hunter's arrow!'

Sismarqui's grief was deepened by the words of his humble friend, and tears sprung to his eyes. But he suppressed the feeling which gave rise to them, and steeled his spirit to the stern purpose he had in view. When they came to the palace-stairs, where the black shadow almost rendered invisible the line dividing the lower marble step from the water, he leaped to land.

'Hopo,' he said, ascending the stairs, 'come up hither. Show me which way the knight took.'

The waterman followed him to the top of the steps, from which was a broad and noble view of the palace rising majestically before him in the cold moonlight, like an edifice of driven snow, and contrasting strongly with the towers or castles of dark blue stone, and warlike battlements, that projected from either wing, half encompassing the Court of Fountains, before it.

'I dared to follow him up through this lime-path, till I saw him turn and take the terrace round beneath the wall of the tower, and enter a small door on the opposite side. I would have followed him through it, but for fear of being seen and arrested by the sentinels, — for I could not bear to see the sweet maiden borne off, without knowing whither, that I might tell you or Montezuma.'

'You have done us both a kindness, good waterman, we shall never forget. Stay; — I would ask you if you have ever seen the prince abroad in full armor?'

'Yes, too often; for never did he take to the streets on horseback but mischief went before him, and tears followed after him.'

'Behold me!' said Sismarqui, placing the prince's imperial plume in his shining casque, and casting over his shoulders the cloak woven of the beautifully green feathers of the cochotl, which none but princes were allowed to wear, and which the prince himself, in wearing it forth from the palace, to disguise his identity, had turned inside out.

The waterman started back as if the prince himself had stood before him, for in height and carriage the two were nearly equal.

'If thou hadst been the prince himself, I could not have been more surprised,' he cried, with admiration.

'Be secret,' said Sismarqui. 'I shall recover the maiden, or thou wilt ne'er behold my face again. Wait here with thy boat one hour. If I come not within that time, I shall come not at all.'

With these words he dropped the visor of his helmet over his face, drew his sword, and placed it beneath his cloak, and disappeared within the dark shadows of the lemon-walk.

Hopo put up a prayer to the gods for his success and the safety of the maiden, and rejoined his companion in the boat. As he stepped into it, and was about to take his seat beside him, to wait the return of Sismarqui, they were startled by a bright flame that suddenly shot upward into the sky from the summit of the Temple of Huitzilotli, and illumined the whole of that quarter of the city. Ere they could express to each other their surprise, a loud shout of triumph filled the air, and the loud *Tlalonzon*, or shield of the god of war, suspended in the temple to give note of hostile alarm, struck quick and strong, and resounded in deep tones throughout the city.

'It is the signal! Montezuma hath no faith in the princess!' they cried with pleasure. 'Liberty! Down with the nobles! Hopo, — Harani! we are, from this moment, free men.'

Such was the spirit kindled in the bosoms of these two men, and such was the spirit that the sounds and signal of revolt awakened in every bondman's breast.

'Sismarqui hath lost faith in the princess! We must now win freedom at the sword's point!'

CHAPTER III.

THE HUNCHBACK AND THE CAVALIER.

WHEN Hucha left the guard-room in which the conference of the four chief conspirators had been held, after his severely ironical speech to Montezuma, he met, near the door, the brother of Sismarqui. With the wonderful power he held over the expression of his countenance, he said to him, in an even voice, and with a slight, pleasant smile, in which there was no sign of the feelings of his heart or the bitterness of his spirit,

'Methinks, stout Gila, that you and I should be friends, inasmuch as we have been equal victims in love.' As he said this, he led him aside, and walked with him along the stone passage of the armory.

'Ah, master Hucha,' said the stout soldier, with emotion; 'I have grieved more for that pretty maiden, than I shall ever do for woman again. Methinks you bear it lightly.'

'Dost thou love her still?' asked the Hunchback, quietly, but with a searching glance of his piercing and restless eyes.

'I would lay down my life for her, now,' answered the man-at-arms warmly.

'And she would not thank thee. Dost thou not know she is a proud thing?'

'It is the pride of beauty, master Hucha,' answered the stout soldier; 'pride is a part of beauty in woman, as much as bravery is a part of strength in man.'

'Thou hast well answered; but it is the pride of contempt. She scorned thee!'

'Never, master Hunchback,' answered Gila, bluntly. 'She hath too much gentleness and goodness to scorn any one.'

'Why didst thou give her up?'

'Because she told me she could not love me; and she spoke so sweetly when she said it, and told me so prettily, if I would forget her and regard her only as a sister, it would make her happy, that the very sweetness of her look did away the bitterness of her tongue.'

'And like a fool you swallowed the sugared pill. I tell thee she laughed at thee.'

'Laughed! Her laughter is music,' said the enamored soldier. 'But you mean something more, by thy tone and eye. Out with it, master.'

'She did make merry with thy love for her, in my presence; likening thee to some huge condor of the Cotopaxi peak making love to the singing *cenzonilli*.'

'She hath a pleasant humor,' said the stout man-at-arms, laughing good humoredly. 'I faith she hath nearly hit it!'

The dwarf bit his lip with disappointment and vexation, and walked along silently, for a few seconds; at length, turning to him, he said angrily,

'Gila, thou art an ass! If she had told thee thou wert a fool, verily I believe thou wouldst have commended her good sense, and had she ridiculed thee to thy face, thou wouldst have laughed with her.'

'Truly, I would, master,' said the imperturbable man-at-arms; 'no pretty woman can make me angry, and especially one I love.'

'But she loves not thee.'

'But I do love her, and shall till my dying day,' answered Gila, stoutly. 'But I tell thee what, master Hucha,' he added in a low tone, 'there are some ugly men that can anger me, if they press me too closely. You have been trying to get up a quarrel between me and Fatziza; and you have spoken against her, because she hath liked a strait-limbed youth, like my brother, Sismarqui, better than ——'

'Stop *there*, Gila,' said the Hunchback, laying his hand strongly upon the arm of the soldier; 'I can complete the sentence, if need be.' And the dwarf's eyes literally blazed as he spoke.

'Well, well, — I will not say it. But thou shouldst beware how thou speakest against others. Go, now! for what end thou hast sought this conference with me, I know not. If thou hadst hoped to effect thy object by defaming Fatziza, thou hast missed it.'

'Good Gila,' said Hucha, at once subduing all emotion, and speaking in a tone singularly soft and insinuating, 'I hope you will forgive me; — I meant not to anger thee.'

'I do forgive thee, Hucha. Nothing that one like thee can say will ever offend me. I know that thou hast a feud with nature, from thy birth, and that thou lookest upon mankind as thy natural foes, that are ever holding up to thy morbid vision the mirror in which thou seest not thyself, but what thou shouldst be. By mine honor, I pity thee; and thou mayst be as bitter against me as thou wilt, and I forgive thee. But, I pray thee, let sweet Fatziza alone. She is a woman, and doth not, like thy fellow-men, ever mock thee with the presence of the comeliness of manly stature, which the gods have denied to thee!'

The Hunchback stood still an instant, with a sad and heavy countenance, as if the words of the blunt soldier had allayed his feelings as well as displeased him. At length he said, grasping his hand,

'I did seek to tamper with thee, and by exciting thy resentment against the maiden, extend it to her brother, and even to them, — for to be tempted to quit them and join me in what I contemplate, I know I must break thy confidence in them both. But 'tis past! Where is thy noble captain? I would see him.'

'Did I not say thou wert by nature prone to evil?' said the soldier, with something of self-approval in his tones; 'thou wouldst make brothers foes to bring about thine own purposes.'

'Where is thy captain?' demanded the dwarf, impatiently.

'In the ward-room of the armory thou wilt find him. The governor of the arsenal is at his palace. He little suspects that his gay son hath turned rebel, and all for love of a pretty maiden. His head hangs loosely on his neck.'

'Lead me to him. I would see him,' said Hucha, peremptorily.

'More mischief. The gods give him wit to keep out of it. Yonder is the door. Open it, and enter,' said the man-at-arms, pointing to the extremity of the passage in which they were.

The Hunchback left him, and the next moment disappeared within the apartment.

'There goes more generosity and manly spirit, by nature, than is in all Mexico beside,' said the man-at-arms, fixing his gaze on the door the dwarf had closed behind him. 'But his heart is so warped and distorted by a way he has of incessantly feeding upon his deformity, as if all men hated him for it, and he felt himself bound to hate all mankind in return, that it is now

scarce less deformed than his body. He reminds me, with his fair smile, of the Peruvian flower I have heard of, with a serpent concealed within its leaves, and that strikes its fangs into those who longest nourish it. Hucha has become, of late, most dangerous to his friends. He will do some injury to Fatziza, or I know not his nature. I shall watch him, and warn her.'

With these words, the man-at-arms returned to the place from which he had walked to listen to the address of Montezuma, whose voice he heard on the balcony of the arsenal.

On closing the door of the room into which he had so unceremoniously entered, Hucha found himself in an apartment of large size, the walls of which were hung with every species of offensive and defensive armor. Pieces of armor also lay about on the furniture, a helmet here and a cuirass there, and the room altogether had an appearance of disorder easily accounted for from the present state of excitement, within as well as without the arsenal. The only individual in the room was a young man, with a strikingly elegant person, who, with his head bare and his helmet in his hand, was standing by one of the deep windows, looking out upon the crowd. His air and address were those of a courtier. His attitude was easy and careless, and singularly in contrast with the stirring events of the hour, and his manner was as composed as if he were gazing from the lattice of a lady's boudoir upon a pleasant garden of flowers. He turned his head slightly, as the dwarf entered, and held his ear in that position an instant, as if he expected to be addressed. The Hunchback walked directly to the spot where he stood, with such a quick, stern step, that he turned his head towards him, and, on seeing him, started with an exclamation of surprise, and laid his hand to his sword.

'How now? Who, in the name of Michtlan, art thou?'

'I carry my name on my back, my lord,' said Hucha, with that sarcastic spirit which he was ever retorting upon himself, as if he took a morbid pleasure in anticipating the derision which his sensitive spirit was ever dreading, ever expecting from men.

'I have seen and heard of thee,' said the young man, in a tone of indifference, real or assumed, and with a slight smile, that sharply wounded him. 'Thou art one of the leaders of this revolt. What is thy business with me?'

'Art thou acquainted with all the steps taken by the conspirators, and their ultimate aim?' asked Hucha, without betraying his emotion.

'I have been told them by one Sismarqui. But, hark ye, sir Hunchback. I would know which of you gallant gentlemen are to become our next emperor, if this revolt be successful?'

Hucha looked at him with angry surprise and suspicion, and then replied,

'My lord, I had been told, and this state of things within and without the gates of the arsenal seems plainly to show it, that thou hast given it thy countenance.'

'And thou thy back. Marry! between the two it will have fair support. Nay,' said the young man, laying his hand familiarly upon the dwarf's arm; 'I am careless, and meant nothing. Thou hast business with me. I will hear thee.'

Hucha subdued his irritation; but before he spoke, fixed upon the face of the young soldier one of those keen, searching, analyzing glances, peculiar to him, when he would read the soul. Some suspicions, by no means favorable to the honesty of the young noble's professions of interest in the cause,

had entered his mind, and he sought to satisfy himself if he was to be trusted further in it. The young noble, if he was really insincere, either felt that he was being the subject of some such severe test, and prepared his features to meet it, or else was truly sincere, and evinced it in his countenance; for after a moment's steady and most piercing scrutiny, the dwarf took his eyes from his face, and said,

'My lord, pardon me. I had doubted you. But I know not why I should, after you have placed the arsenal in our hands. I know not what your motives really are in joining us, and giving us access to thousands of arms; but they must, from your rank, be opposite to our own.'

'Tis merely for change,' said the youth, almost languidly. 'Methinks the emperor hath ruled long enough. We live but a little space on the earth, and it is but fair each man should have the chance of being an emperor once in his life. For my part, I would have a new emperor every day. What think you, good Hunchback?'

Hucha expressed his surprise at the young noble's sentiments and inimitably careless manner, by his countenance, and replied,

'My lord, we need no emperor. Rulers, elected for a limited time by the people at large, should alone govern nations.'

'Perhaps so, sir Hunchback,' said the noble, wearily; 'but I have little taste for politics. What would you say to me, for I wish to amuse myself with looking out of the window.' There was an inward smile in the eyes of the youth, and a singular expression about his mouth, that escaped the penetration of the dwarf.

'My lord,' he said, 'methinks you take but little interest in this matter, in which you have so largely committed yourself. But your committal is proof of your sincerity, and I trust you.'

'You are very kind, to be sure,' said the young noble, with a slight accent of irony.

'My lord Ezquilt,' said Hucha, 'I came hither to tell thee, that Montezuma, the leader of the revolt, hath proved a traitor.'

'Ha! this is news.'

'The princess hath bought him, and he hath come hither to stay the people with empty promises, that she will never espouse the prince; and will, on her ascension to the throne, grant them all they could obtain by rebellion.'

'Now thou speakest like a man with matter on his mind,' said the noble, with spirit. 'Who brought this news?'

'Montezuma himself. I hear his voice now, addressing the people. See, they disperse, with shouts for the empress,' he cried, going hastily to the window. 'My lord! my lord! one word from thee will bring them back. One word from thee will stay this traitorous tide.'

'Patience, good Hunchback, patience,' said the young noble, returning from the window, after glancing out, and satisfying himself of the truth of the excited dwarf's words. 'If these have dispersed, let them go, — it will be better for thee and them to-morrow. There be rebels still enow in Mexico for my purpose.'

'Thy purpose?'

'Did I not say — and *thine*? Well — for *thine* and mine.'

'My lord, you speak strangely,' said the dwarf, with displeasure.

'Look ye, sir knight of the shoulders,' said the young lord, with a quiet tone of reproof, slightly touched with menace; 'I have suffered, from one of your degree, much freedom of speech. I have now let my patience of

endurance quite run out. If thou hast nothing further to communicate, I would be alone, for I find my thoughts, at times, most excellent company.'

'I thought, my lord, you were to aid our party. You see it dissolve with indifference.'

'I shall aid it, sir, but in my own way,' answered the young man, with decision. 'Thou wilt commend me to-morrow,' he added, ironically, 'for more energy and interest in this revolt than thou dost now give me credit for. Ho! Why dost thou linger?'

The Hunchback, foiled and disappointed in the object he had in view, cast upon him a hostile and vindictive glance, and left the apartment. The door had no sooner closed, than the young noble's whole manner changed. His languor gave place to energy; his carelessness to decision; his indifference to the expression of intense feeling, and high and determined spirit. To explain all this, it will be necessary to go back a moment to the early part of the evening, when Montezuma, on his return home from the quarter of the lapidaries, spoke with the brother of Sismarqui, who was on guard in the arch, and sought, through him, to get possession of the arsenal. The young noble, who by night held charge of the armory for his father, the old lord Esquitl, was, at the moment of their conference, descending the stairway leading from the rooms above out into the arch, and was in the act of pushing open the lower door, which was ajar, when the words of Montezuma arrested him. The sentinel had stopped directly opposite the door, and so near it that every word of their conversation reached his ear. He immediately returned to the guard-room, where the garrison did duty, and, assembling the inferior officers, informed them of the contemplated revolt, and that Gila would attempt to tamper with them.

'If he mentions it to you, at once accede to it. I have perfect confidence in you, and feel that you, as well as the men-at-arms, will evince their attachment to me by following my wishes. It is my desire that you should seem, with my consent, to give the arsenal into the hands of these rebels.'

The officers at once promised their obedience, and the young man then addressed, in the same manner, in person, each soldier of the garrison. Gila, therefore, had but little to do, when he commenced his mission among his comrades. At length, to his surprise, the young noble himself, giving some light cause for it, came forward and offered his own services and influence. The young lord Esquitl then privately assumed the disguise of a serf, and went forth among the populace, and by nine o'clock had informed himself of all the intentions of the conspirators. Without further delay he then returned to the arsenal, ordered his officers to keep the severest vigilance, and mounting his horse rode to the palace, sought the apartments of the emperor, which he reached just after the prince had left it, and unfolded to him the whole conspiracy.

'Now, your majesty,' he said, when he had completed his recital, 'I pray you, as the reward of my industry in this matter, leave the management of it all to me. To-morrow morning you shall hear no more of it. Let not the empire be involved in a civil war by any rash step. I am acquainted with every intention and plan of the insurgents, and will meet them on their own ground, and defeat them, with little loss of blood. Pray, your majesty, grant my request.'

The emperor, pleased at the spirit and decision of the young noble, gave his consent.

'Do as you will,' he said; 'the safety of the empire is in your hands. You,

who have so well and ably detected the plan of the conspirators, will best know how to defeat it.'

'Thanks, your majesty. May it please you to grant me written commands to your generals and captains of all the posts within the city, and at the gates.'

'It shall be done.'

With these important orders in his hands, the young noble immediately left the presence of the emperor. In one hour afterwards, thirty thousand troops were silently in motion on the revolted side of the canal, and into every garrison were thrown soldiers enough to maintain it. To preserve the greater secrecy, every street through which they marched was at once blockaded, and those who saw the troops in motion were, therefore, unable to report it. By a private way, communicating between the armory and the second bridge, he marched secretly three thousand men-at-arms, and made their officers form them on the inside, around the walled area of this edifice. By eleven o'clock every post likely to be attacked, — the gates, bridges, and arsenal, — were in a state not only of defence, but were able to pour out battalions, which, by their superior discipline, could easily rout any parties of the insurgents that should assail them. From time to time, this extraordinary young man despatched couriers to the emperor, to inform him of the progress of events.

Such was the mine over which the conspirators had been blindly moving, during the latter part of the evening. Sismarqui himself had heard rumors of troops in motion, but he received no certain intelligence, and, being in expectation of such an event, though certainly on a smaller scale, from the public nature of the conspiracy, he paid little regard to it. Montezuma himself was at the palace, and had heard no rumor whatever, and was still wholly ignorant he had such an able coadjutor in carrying out his own views and those of the princess. The young noble, feeling, therefore, very cool and confident in the event, placed himself by the window, in an easy, indolent attitude, natural to him, to observe the multitude, resolved, when the signal should be lighted on the summit of the temple, and the insurgents began to assail the gates, before which they were now waiting, to let loose upon them his three thousand men-at-arms, and cut them in pieces. He felt, indeed, regret at the necessity of such a step; but, like all the nobles, he had little sympathy for the serfs. When Hucha intruded into his presence, he recognized him, at a glance, as one of the leaders of the rebellion. Instantly, and with great address, he assumed, to hide his true one, a character wholly foreign to his own, — which he so well preserved throughout the interview, as successfully to foil even the shrewd and suspicious scrutiny of the Hunchback.

'How have I put that keen-eyed dwarf at fault, though my impatience with the rebel serf had more than once made me betray myself,' he said, as Hucha left the room. 'Methinks I should make a good diplomatist, when I get more years. I will suggest it to my pretty princess. Can this be true, that he hath told me of her? The princess pledge herself to these scum and offal of her empire, that she will not wed with Palipan — will pardon their rank revolt, and give them, if they will wait till she is empress, a charter of liberties! 'Tis strange! How knew she of this rebellion? Or knowing it, wherefore sent she for this Montezuma, instead of letting out upon them half the army of the empire? 'Tis beyond my brain's skill to get to the bottom of it. It were easier far to get at the root of a deep revolt, and meet

it half way ere it come to head, than ask and answer why or wherefore a woman does so or so. 'T is a hard nut! Well, I'll leave it for to-morrow's cracking. It would have been policy to have arrested these conspirators, when within the arsenal; but then it were, I thought, deeper policy to let them lead the rebels on, and so take them in the act of arms. This Hunchback I was tempted to detain, when I saw the rebels were dispersing; but I feared I should but keep him out of some mischief he seemed to be bent on, in which I pray he will get nothing less than a broken head.'

He approached the window as he ended, and glanced upon the deserted street.

'So! that is better than if it was piled with their slain bodies. I am glad this is likely to end without bloodshed, especially as the princess seems to have taken it up in this light. But if my Hunchback friend can help it, things will not go off so peaceably as they promise to. I will to my general and his men-at-arms. The old soldier will growl to find there will be no fighting. Nevertheless, I shall keep them under arms till day-light. The elements of revolt have been too deeply and widely agitated, to subside all at once throughout the city.'

At this moment, a lieutenant of the men-at-arms entered the room.

'Well. Hualpi?'

'Shall Gila be arrested?'

'Is he not? At once. The rogue's head shall answer his treason; nought else.'

'Montezuma, the rebel chief, hath not long departed. The men, pleading fear of death, did arrest him, as he went forth, hoping you would approve it, lest he should do more mischief hereafter among the people, by his influence.'

'He is a brave fellow. I am glad he hath escaped. He should have been one of us, but fortune hath given him cap and staff, instead of helmet and sword.'

'He left with them this signet, for which they permitted him to depart,' continued the officer, presenting the gem.

'It is the royal seal of the princess!' he exclaimed, looking at its face.

'He said the princess gave it him to show to the people, in testimony of the truth of her words.'

'Ha! said the serf so? Then there is truth in this Hunchback's tale. 'T is most strange. Go, Hualpi, and see that the gates of the arsenal are safely and strongly secured, and have this traitorous soldier put in chains.'

The officer departed, and the noble, fastening on his helmet, also immediately afterwards went out by an opposite door, which, by a broad flight of steps, led to a vast court below. When he reached their foot, he found himself in the midst of a group of young knights and an elderly noble, while all around the court were ranged, ten or twelve men deep, the numerous men-at-arms he had secretly conducted into the armory. They stood still and motionless, like a forest of iron men. The moonlight fell upon the forms of half of them, on one side of the court, leaving the other half standing in deep shadow, cast by the frowning battlements around. The young man paused an instant, to gaze upon a scene so impressive, and indulge the martial feelings it kindled in his breast, and then approached the venerable commander of the legion, who stood within a few feet of the foot of the stairs.

'My noble general,' he said, 'I fear we shall have little work for the men at-arms to-night. The revolt is likely to pass off peaceably.'

'Pray the gods it may,' answered he. 'I have never seen good to either come of dissensions between the people and their prince. What is the change?'

'It seems the princess hath early discovered that a conspiracy threatened the state, and sent to have an interview with the young Montezuma.'

'This was good policy,' said the old noble.

'It was, perhaps, for a woman, and this young rebel leader is a proper youth for a woman's eye,' he said, smiling.

'Young man, remember you speak of the princess,' replied the general, in a reproving tone. 'What was the result?'

'That he told her, probably, the causes of the revolt, and she speedily sent him back, bidding him tell the people they should, on her accession to the throne, have every privilege they desired.'

'She forgot the prince, who will then be emperor,' said the old noble, shaking his head.

'Nay, she bade him say to them, that she had resolved not to espouse Prince Palipan, and would reign sole empress.'

'What proof have you of this, beyond this young man's words?'

'This signet. It is her own, given him to show to the people.'

'It is strange news.'

'What is stranger, the insurgents, — some two thousand in number, — that now filled the street, have quietly dispersed.'

'T is the princess' royal signet, surely,' repeated the noble, taking and again examining it. 'Well, I know not what to make of it. The prince discarded! What saith the emperor?'

'He cannot know it. I have seen him within three hours, — at least, he spoke not of it.'

'And the prince?'

'I have not seen him to-night.'

'The revolt, then, is ended without bloodshed,' said the old noble. 'T is best it should be so. The people, it is true, are something oppressed, and doubtless the princess will rule them kindly. Ha! what light is that?' he cried, as the whole court was suddenly lightened.

'Ho, sentinel! what ho!' shouted the young noble, to a man on the battlements.

'A bright flame on the altar of the Temple of War,' was the loud reply.

'It is the signal of revolt, lighted by some party that know not of this message from the princess, or the serf's tale hath been a ruse to bring about some deep plot,' cried the young man. 'Hark! there thunders the tlalon-zon. The alarm is fairly sounded. To horse, knights! Press forward to the temple with the legions.'

The court of the armory was instantly in motion, — knights were leaping into their saddles, or riding here and there marshalling their divisions, — the gates were thrown open, and, headed by the old noble, the columns poured forth into the street, and separating, marched in two parties by different routes, in the direction of the still brightly blazing signal fire. On gaining the street, the young lord Ezquilt, accompanied by half a dozen young knights, galloped on ahead of the troops, too impatient to arrive on the scene, to await the heavier and slower movements of the men-at-arms.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SIGNAL FIRE.

HUCHA quitted the apartment of the young noble with the bitterest feelings of resentment rankling in his heart at the severe treatment he had got from him, and vowed future revenge. But a deeper feeling than any merely personal considerations now held the control of his mind. From the first moment of incipient revolt, he had given himself to the cause with the truest and loftiest patriotism. His heart bled for his country, and his self-love had received too many wounds from the nobility to let him rest content with his own condition, without some attempt to improve it. Every energy of his energetic character, therefore, he freely devoted to the cause he had espoused, and he had looked only to the end originally proposed, for success. When the proposition of the princess fell on his ear, his fiery spirit at once rose against any such species of temporizing in a matter which he felt must then, and by arms, be decided, or the opportunity would be lost forever. His singular sagacity, sharpened by habitual jealousy, had enabled him to detect the true motive, (at least, a very strong one,) that prompted Montezuma to adopt the pacific measures suggested by the princess. He knew not, however, how far his feelings were interested in obeying her, or he would not have hesitated to have plunged his dagger into his heart, when he proposed the submission. Montezuma himself dared not look too closely into his own motives, and felt conscious that they could ill bear the scrutiny of others less interested than himself.

Satisfied that his country and her awakened liberties were about to be sacrificed, if not betrayed, Hucha resolved, if but one blow was struck for the cause to which he had given his heart and consecrated his life, he himself would strike it. On leaving Montezuma and the two other conspirators, it was his intention to retire from the arsenal and at once lift the standard of revolt, in a part of the city which would not, for some time, learn the proposals of the princess. As he came out of the door, he saw Gila, and at once conceived the idea of getting him to join him, as the presence of a man-at-arms, as well as the influence he had as a citizen with his fellows, would contribute greatly to his success. He was defeated, however, by the blunt honesty of the soldier, and thence, for the same purpose, sought the young lord Esquil. The reception he met with in this quarter was such as to give no opportunity of communicating his exact intentions and wishes, and he was compelled to depart as he came.

Without further delay, or addressing any one, he took his way swiftly along the passage; but, to avoid a group of soldiers standing near the head of the arch stair-case, from whom he imagined he should receive some insult, and possibly be detained, — instead of keeping on to the end, he instinctively turned aside into a window that opened upon a terrace. At the extremity of it he saw a tree that could be reached by a light bound. He hastily traversed the terrace towards it, and without hesitation sprang into the branches, and by the trunk swiftly descended to the earth. The spot where he alighted was on the left of the crowd, who were in motion towards their homes. Without speaking to any one, he glided swiftly along the dark side of the lane, and soon came into the net-maker's street. Here he paused

an instant, as if prompted to enter the dwelling of Montezuma, with his gaze on the balcony and window of Fatziza's chamber, as if his thoughts were associated with the maiden. But the next instant, he pursued his way in the direction of the armorer's street, muttering,

'T will be time enough by-and-by! Sismarqui shall never wear that gem in his bosom, if I have to despoil it with my own hand. Ha! there are shouts in the direction of the armorers' quarter. There are some men yet to be found in Mexico, that will not longer wear the yoke of bondage.'

Confused cries, growing louder and louder as he advanced, caused him almost to fly; for he distinguished the words, 'Liberty, and no empress.' The next moment he was in the street before the armorers' shop, where a thousand men were gathered.

'Liberty, and no empress!' he shouted, in a voice that rose clear and strong above the tumult.

Every eye was turned upon him, and his name was repeated by a hundred voices. At a glance, he saw that Inisquini, the old sword-maker, who stood in his door, had been communicating to them the will of the princess, and that the majority were opposed to it. The whole multitude were armed with pikes or swords, and every man had a shield on his arm, which he had taken from the shops of the armorer and sword-maker. The actual possession of arms had given them a warlike spirit, and rendered them reluctant to lay them aside; the multitude which Montezuma had addressed were unarmed, and, therefore, had more readily embraced the terms he proposed. The Horschback saw at once the advantage this spirit offered; and, while the sword-maker was yet speaking, cried aloud, as he advanced within a few feet of him,

'My friends and brothers, the old man is a traitor. Montezuma, your chosen leader, has betrayed us to the emperor. Let us act without them both. I will lead you on to freedom, and *thus* do I consecrate my sword to the sacred cause, in a traitor's blood!'

With these words, he sheathed his sword in the heart of the old man. There was a cry of horror from some that stood around and beheld the deed, but it was instantly drowned by a fierce cry of exultation, and the air rang with shouts of

'Death to all traitors! Down with the emperor and nobles! Long live Hucha!'

'Forward to the Temple of War!' cried the dwarf, taking advantage of their enthusiasm. 'Let us light the signal fires, and proclaim liberty as far as its light shall be seen.'

He hastened forward as he spoke, followed by the insurgents, shouting their insurrectionary cries, and striking their swords upon their shields. After turning from the street of the armorers, he led them across a square, their numbers increasing as they moved onward, and came to a short, steep street, that at the top terminated in a lofty flight of marble steps, which led to a circular temple of red stone, surrounded by a lofty colonnade. On its flat summit was an altar to the god Huitziltli, which was gained by a spiral stairway, ascending from the centre of the temple. On this altar was sacrifice offered morning and evening, and upon it was now laid the wood and combustible materials for the next sacrifice. Hucha pointed with his gory sword upward to the majestic temple:

'There is the altar of liberty, fellow-slaves. Let us light there the pyre of our fallen chains. Onward!'

In the steep passage to the temple, at the foot of the steps, stood a party of some threescore young men, whose number completely filled the way. They waited unmoved the approach of the insurgents, until the Hunchback, at their head, got within a few feet of them. One of them, armed lightly with a sword, a tortoise shield rimmed with silver, and a low steel cap upon his head, then stepped towards him.

'Hucha, welcome!' he said, with animation; 'but where is Montezuma? What means the multitude, that they come hither? 'Tis but a temple, and Montezuma and ourselves were to seize and hold it.'

'Montezuma is a traitor!' cried Hucha, fiercely.

'Who hath said it?' demanded the young man, menacingly.

'He hath confessed it. The princess hath bought him.'

'Tis false!' cried the young man, resolutely. 'Montezuma is no traitor. Nay — keep back, Hucha! He hath appointed us to this post, to await his coming. No man shall enter it, save he.'

'Ha! this is strange, Inzecan,' said the Hunchback, with concentrated rage in the steady tones with which he spoke.

'What is thy purpose here?' asked the youth, quietly and firmly.

'To light the signal fire, and proclaim the birth of freedom.'

'No man's hand shall light it but Montezuma's. We have sworn to him to abide here until he shall appear, and to let no man kindle the altar until he commands it. He is our chief.'

'I tell thee he is a traitor. Leave the way open to the temple.'

'And I tell thee thou art not Montezuma's friend, as thy words prove. None save his friends enter here.'

'Inzecan,' said the Hunchback, impressively, 'let not the first blood be spilled among ourselves.'

'Thou hast blood glistening wet on thy blade. Whose is it?'

'A traitor's!'

'Ha, Montezuma's!' cried the young man, seizing him by the throat.

'An equal traitor, — Inisquini, the sword-maker.'

'Assassin!' he cried, flinging him from him.

The Hunchback recovered himself, and, turning to the insurgents, who had hitherto been passive, cried in deep rage,

'My friends, shall we let this beardless stripling stand in our path to freedom? The gods have willed that we must first hew our way through traitors. Onward, to the temple!'

The young man made a signal to his party, and the whole breadth of the narrow avenue was at once taken possession of by them, and with ready weapons they stood prepared to receive the assailants. The dwarf waved his sword to the insurgents, who had caught his spirit, and leaped forward like a tiger, with a fierce cry, upon the young leader. The van of the revolvers pressed closely behind him, and the two parties were at once engaged in terrific and deadly combat. For a few minutes the fight seemed equal, and neither party gave or gained ground. Many fell on both sides; and at length the number of the young men became sensibly diminished, while, for those who fell of the attacking party, there were numbers ready to supply their places. Finally, the defenders of the temple and friends of Montezuma became reduced to so small a number, that they could no longer fill with their front the width of the avenue, and they gave way, retreating up the steps of the temple. They, however, were nearly all slain by the infuriated revolvers ere they gained the top, where their captain made a stand, singly

and unsupported, against Hucha, who, covered with blood, had pressed him, during the fight, with a vindictiveness of purpose, that would only be satisfied with his life. This, at length, he obtained; and drawing forth his ensanguined steel as the youth fell, the last of his band, he waved it above his head, and shouted, 'Victory! So perish all enemies of freedom, and all friends of Montezuma!' The insurgents were now hastening towards the steps leading to the altar, when he cried, commandingly,

'Hold, each of you! No hand but mine shall light the altar-fire. Remain thou here, and when you see its flame, lift up your voices to the gods!'

With these words, he passed through their midst, as they silently gave way before him, by their submission singularly acknowledging the supremacy of the superior mind of the dwarf, who, by its energy alone, had exerted such wonderful influence over them. Slowly and solemnly the successful revolter ascended the winding steps in the interior of the temple, and at length disappeared from every uplifted gaze upon the lofty elevation. A deep murmur passed through the multitude, succeeded by a profound waiting awe.

The summit of the Temple, on which the Hunchback appeared, was a circular area, nearly flat, enclosed by battlements, in the form of niches, and ornamented with many stone figures of serpents. It was curiously paved, with smooth polished stones, of various colors, and contained in the centre a square altar of black marble, supported by four sculptured lions. In front of the altar, between two beams, was suspended a vast round shield, covered with innumerable martial devices. From an opening beneath the altar, the dwarf made his appearance upon the top.

His first act, on gaining this spot, was solemnly to lay his sword and shield at the base of the altar, and fall prostrate on his face. He remained in this posture a few seconds, and then rising, took up his arms, and ascending the altar by five steps, laid them upon the wood and combustible materials that were piled upon it, saying,—

'Thus, ye sacred gods! and thou warlike Huitziltli, whose aid I crave, do I make an offering of the sword and shield of liberty. Consecrate them with fire, and return them to me, that, bearing them in this war, I may be invincible and victorious!'

He then walked around the altar, where, in a brazen tripod, within a niche, was kept the sacred fire. Beside it sat a venerable priest, in white vestments, wearing upon his hoary locks a steel helmet, and holding in his hands a two-edged sword, having an iron head like a hammer.

'Who art thou, young man?' he asked, without emotion or surprise; 'and wherefore have you visited the Temple of Huitziltli?'

'To pay my vows, sacred priest, and to kindle the altar fire!'

'Pure vows are ever welcome to the god! But thou art not a knight? What hast thou to do with vows to the god of warriors?' he asked, gazing upon him with surprise.

'Old man,' said the Hunchback, impatiently, 'I have no time to answer questions. Give me thy torch, that I may kindle it at thy sacred lamp, and light the altar!'

'Wherefore these strange words? There is commotion among the people, and I have heard, as I watched this holy flame, shrieks, and shouts, and noise of battle. What is the evil that hath come upon the city?'

'Not evil, but good! Liberty hath descended from the skies, and I would here sacrifice to her. Stand aside, old man!' he said, sternly.

'Do the people revolt?'

'They have risen in their might, as one man, to obtain the gift of nature, and of the gods! Stand aside, for I would not harm thee.'

'Wilt thou do sacrilege?' cried the priest with sternness, mingled with horror.

'Nay — if thou wilt, give me thy torch and let me light it!'

'Back, young man!' cried the priest, rising from his seat before the niche, which for centuries had been thus guarded; 'I am a priest of the temple and of the altar!'

'And I the possessor of the temple and altar,' answered the dwarf. 'Give me thy torch. I have no time to dally with thee!'

The priest replied by laying his torch for kindling the morning sacrifice in the niche beside the burning lamp, and presenting his sword across his person, as if to guard the sacred fire. This attitude, assumed by him, inflamed the resentment of the dwarf, already familiar with blood and outrage, and throwing himself upon the priest, he wrested the sword from him, and, dragging him to the altar, slew him with his own sword, and, with supernatural strength, cast him upon it. The next instant, the sacred pile was in a blaze: and, with the iron head of the sword he sounded loudly, upon the shield swung before it, the tocsin of war.

Then, snatching his sword and shield from the altar, he sprang upon the battlements, and waved it in the presence of the thousands below. The air was filled with an answering shout, that made the solid temple tremble beneath him. He remained an instant before their eyes, appearing to them as if standing in the flame, and then descended. The fire he had lighted burned brighter and fiercer as it seized upon the vestments and body of the priest, and shone for leagues over the city, displaying, like noon-day, its temples, bridges, encircling walls and towers, and far-distant lake.

On arriving below among his party, he made a signal to address them.

'The first step is taken,' he cried aloud; 'there is now no room for retreat. We must overthrow the empire, or be ourselves crushed! To the first bridge, and let us attack it! Thence to the palace! Give no quarter to knight nor noble, for they will not spare you!'

'To the palace!' was the answering cry of the insurgents, who had now increased to full seven thousand men, filling the temple, the steps, and avenue to it, and all the square below.

Placing himself at the head of those about him, and naming others for leaders to marshal the rest, the Hunchback left the Temple, and descended towards the square. It was filled with a confused and irresolute multitude, variously armed, and swaying to and fro, as one self-elected leader cried one thing, and another another. The presence of the dwarf among them gave rise to opposite emotions.

'Live the brave Hucha!' cried some.

'Down with the Hunchback,' answered others. 'Montezuma! Sismarqui! where are they!'

'No Montezuma! no traitors!' replied the party about the dwarf, menacingly.

Amid these conflicting cries, the young Lord Esquil and his friends galloped into the square, and, sword in hand, attacked the outskirts of the multitude. Here the most dire dismay and confusion ensued, for many standing there were unarmed, and, as yet, rather interested spectators than actors in the scene. They gave way before the furious attack of the young cavaliers.

who pressed through them towards the elevated part of the square, where, by the clear light, the noble beheld the person of the dwarf, who with voice and gesture, was endeavoring to inspire those who gave way before their charge to make a stand.

'They are but half a score!' he cried, with scorn and anger. 'Strike them down! They are knights! bear them to the ground! They are your masters, slaves! Unhorse and trample them in the dust!'

Some of the insurgents, as they came nearer, made a show of resistance; but as knight and horse were all clad in complete armor, they made no impression upon them. On all sides they were compelled to give way, and the horsemen at length reached the spot where the Hunchback stood, surrounded by about eight hundred resolute men, who remained firm, as if resolved to receive the charge.

'These look more determined,' said the young noble: 'but let us at them. I have a particular desire to have further acquaintance with my friend of the hump-back!'

'By the gods! it is the false knight, Ezquilt that leads them,' cried the dwarf, hearing these words. 'So, wait not for their charge! Why stand you still? We are revolters, and our business is to advance and strike, not stand and ward!'

He pressed forward as he spoke, and caught the horse of the knight by the bit, while, with his sword, he aimed a blow at his helmet. His followers, inspired by his words and example, also attacked the other knights, with indescribable fury, six or seven assailing a single one, so that they were well nigh overpowered, and borne to the ground, by the weight and number of their opponents. At length one of them fell beneath the blows of a battle-axe, in the hands of a huge smith, and one or two others with difficulty warded the strokes that thickly fell upon them from a score of arms. So determined were the insurgents, that a few moments longer would not have left a knight upon his horse, when, from the eastern entrance to the square, was heard the sound of a score of war-trumpets, and the well known battle-cry of men-at-arms.

'Now, sir Hunchback! thou hast run thy brief race,' cried the young noble, who had been contending for his life with the dwarf and half a score of others.

'Traitorous noble! would to the gods I had struck thee to the heart in thy room,' said Hucha, seeing column after column pour into the square from different streets. 'I deserve this, for being such a fool as to be deceived by thee!'

In an instant the work of slaughter began. Hucha left the knight, and threw himself among the insurgents, and animated them to resistance.

'It is but death now, or death to-morrow! Let us die nobly!'

But in vain their faint struggles of resistance. A few fought bravely, and died where they fought. But all in vain! The men-at-arms swept the square like a besom. Hucha threw himself upon one of the fallen cavaliers' horses, and galloped from point to point, to rally them. But his voice had lost its power. His influence had failed to govern them. Fear — terror — universal dismay, alone prevailed. The bravest of the insurgents were panic-struck by the consternation of their fellows, and, taking the contagion, fled equally with them. So sudden and total was the dispersion of the seven thousand serfs that a few minutes before filled the square, that not one hundred remained, save the dead and dying, that literally strewed the

ground. This party of one hundred, headed by Hucha, retreated to the entrance of the temple, where, for an instant, they made a stand.

The old general of the legion now came up to the spot where the young noble was assisting one of his unhorsed companions to rise.

'They have served you rightly, my lord,' he said sternly. 'It was madness, with so small a party, to rush into the midst of thousands of infuriated men.'

'They were but serfs, my lord!'

'They have shown themselves to have the power to slay. Alas! Here are four young nobles lifeless by your temerity.'

'My noble general, I did but my duty. I knew you would be up to sustain me with the men-at-arms. I pray you, my lord, call off the pursuit,' he added, as the men-at-arms, in small divisions, followed the fugitives through the several streets. Yonder is the head of the revolt! See, he has leaped from his stolen horse, and is flying upwards to the temple, with the remnant of his party. Stay, my lord; he is my prisoner! Let him be taken alive!' he cried, as a detachment of soldiers were sent by the general towards the temple.

They reached the steps before Hucha and his friends could gain the portico; who, seeing that all was lost, here made his final stand. The men-at-arms had already engaged with them, when the young noble rode up, and called upon the insurgents to lay down their arms.

'Nay—listen not to the false knight!' cried Hucha; 'let us die here like men, if we have lived slaves!'

'Lay down your arms, and surrender your leader, and I promise you pardon, in the name of the Emperor, by mine honor as a knight.'

'The men-at-arms paused, and the insurgents looked, with but one feeling, upon the dwarf. He looked scornfully and haughtily around upon them, and seemed to await their decision.

'Your reply—death or pardon?' demanded the young man, sternly.

'Pardon,' cried the revolvers, casting their arms at the feet of the men-at-arms, and kneeling upon the steps of the temple.

Hucha looked round upon them with a countenance of grief and contempt, and then, lifting his hands to the skies, cried impressively,

'I do devoutly thank the gods that these slaves have not been made free by my hand! Slaves they have been—slaves they have this night shown themselves to be—and slaves they will ever remain! The gods, in defeating this rebellion, have shown themselves wiser than they who set it on foot. My lord, I give you up my sword! I hoped with it to free my country—but I have found her unworthy of freedom, and do only regret I should have believed liberty and honor to have their abode in the bosoms of bondmen. The gods, I find, have fixed the destinies of all mankind, and 't is not for men to change them. Take my sword, my lord. I drew it with the prayer that my countrymen might be free. I lay it down with the prayer that they may continue slaves! Once more, do I devoutly thank the gods for saving the empire from the despotism of bondmen, who so love their chains, that they would have entwined with them the pillars of their palaces, and wreathed them about the imperial sceptre they would have usurped!'

With these words the insurgent leader gave his sword to the young noble, whom his lofty language and manner had inspired with admiration and respect.

'If ever revolt could have succeeded, it would have been with a man like thee at the head,' he said, with warmth. 'I know not which feeling is uppermost in my mind, pity for these, thy traitorous companions, who have now shrunk beneath thy withering words, or admiration for thyself, who, at such a time, can speak so boldly, and maintain thy fallen condition so well. Thou shalt be borne prisoner to the emperor's castle; but fear not, — I will befriend thee.'

'Fear! My lord, I have no fears, save that I shall be suffered to live. I have seen my bosom friends turn traitors, and my companions in arms prove false to themselves and to me. I have lived long enough on earth. I would see if there be liberty in yonder glittering empire of the gods.'

'Guard him to the castle by the palace, and see that he lays not hands on his life, and that he be not illy-entreated,' said the noble.

The insurgent leader was then placed in the midst of a detachment of soldiers, conducted by an officer, and led away. In a few moments afterward, the general of the legion rode up to the young nobleman, and informed him of the total discomfiture of the rebels, and that, save dead men lying in the streets, no signs of an insurgent was to be seen.'

In a short time afterward, the troops returned to the square, from their slaughter, rather than victory, and the young lord Esquitl, their general, and a party of cavaliers, preceded them to the armory. The garrisons in the other quarters of the city, on seeing the signal-fire blazing from the temple, and hearing the tocsin of alarm sounded on the war-shield, having had instructions to make no movement forth, but remain and defend the posts, if assailed, strictly obeyed the order, though aware a fierce conflict was raging in the neighborhood of the temple of Huitziltili. The quarter of the lapidaries was commanded by a stationary garrison, which the insurgents of that district had seen augmented by four thousand men, which at ten o'clock silently passed through their street, taking possession of it as they moved on towards the post. Here, therefore, there was no outbreak, even at the sound of the tocsin, although this point promised, early in the evening, to be the chief seat of the revolt, under the immediate direction of Montezuma. This the observing and sagacious young noble had learned while in disguise, and so formed his plans and gave his instructions, as, by the movement and disposition of his troops, effectually to awe any insurrectionary spirit, that might be ready to break out. The result, as well as the issue of the whole revolt, bore testimony to his sagacity and military judgment. On arriving at the armory, he selected three young knights and twenty men-at-arms to accompany him on what he said would be a brief expedition, and, if successful, wholly terminate the rebellion. On assembling them, he rode rapidly at their head in a direction opposite to that from which he had just come.

CHAPTER V.

THE VISION OF THE KINGS.

WHEN Montezuma parted from Sismarqui, beneath the arch-way of the arsenal, he walked forward at a rapid pace in the direction of the ruined palace of Axusco, where he had left the Peruvian knight. It was within a few minutes of midnight, and he was fearful, that, impatient for the signal, the knight might in person rouse the quarter of the lapidaries, and thus, by leading them into open revolt, defeat his purpose in hastening forward. After traversing several streets without meeting with any one, he came in sight of the dilapidated and ruinous mansion of the exiled noble. The moonlight shone softly down upon its moss-grown roofs and ivy-clad columns, upon its ruinous towers and stately marble porticos and colonnades, and presented a soft and lovely, but sad and touching scene. He paused an instant, to contemplate it and reflect upon the fallen glory of the proud family, of which it was so striking an emblem; and then crossing the street towards its grass-grown entrance, passed into its court. The knight's horse was cropping the rank weeds not far from him. Fallen columns were strewn around; trees, that had returned to their forest wildness, cast their shadows upon him; and fountains without water stood silently amid the court, the white statues that adorned them appearing like the spirits of the departed inhabitants holding vigils over the desolated grandeur. He walked sadly but rapidly forward through the court, and approached the wing in which he had seen the knight disappear. He was about to ascend the broken steps, when his eye fell upon a group of men, standing within the shadow of a column of the portico. They at the same moment beheld him, and approached him.

'Welcome, Montezuma,' said one of them, whom he recognized as one of the chiefs that had met in his house, and for whom he had appointed this rendezvous, and which now, for the first time since then, occurred to him. His object hither had been only to see the knight, and dissuade him from the revolt. His heart sunk within him the thought he should have to do over again the same work he had done at the armory.

'You are welcome, my friends. I see you are at the rendezvous promptly.'

'How goes the sacred cause?' asked one, with animation.

'T is time for action,' said another, grasping his sword.

'My brave friends, I am pained for your sakes, to tell you, that the conspiracy is known at the palace. We must defer it till another day. It will not answer to rise in arms to-night. I have spoken with a large party of our friends, who agree with me, and have retired to their homes. It is the safest.'

This communication was received with exclamations of surprise and regret.

'Alas, our liberties are lost, I fear,' said the chief who had first spoken.

'Nay,' said Montezuma, with animation; the princess hath sent word, having learned of our intended revolt, that she marries not the prince; and on ascending the throne as empress, will grant us whatever charter of liberties we may desire. This is better than rebellion.'

'The princess is good and generous,' said one; 'but I fear she promises more than the nobles will let her perform.'

'I am willing to trust her, my friends,' said Montezuma, warmly; 'and should she refuse to ratify her promise to us, we can then take arms.'

'Be it so. You are our leader, and have at heart the good of every Mexican bondman,' they replied, with ready assent.

'This willingness, on your part, my brave friends,' said the young man, with feeling, 'to wait the decision of your princess, is a far greater evidence of your patriotism and love for your country than heading this rebellion would have been. I pray you, on your way to your homes, do all in your power to allay the spirit of revolt among the people. In a few days, we will all be freer by the princess' hand, than we could have been by our swords.'

He here took leave of the conspirators, after a few more words of caution against listening to those who should be obstinately disposed to carry on the insurrection.

'I have got through this disagreeable duty far easier than I anticipated,' he said, looking after them as they left the ruins. 'I do believe, from the willingness with which I have undertaken the duty of suppressing this incipient movement, that I regard the will of the sweet princess more than the liberties of my fellow-bondmen. But I feel I am no longer a bondman. The extraordinary favor of the princess hath ennobled me, and raised me above my condition, I already feel. I have no reason now to be an insurgent. No, no. The ironical Hucha was half way to the truth when he denominated me a traitor. Can there be a stronger motive offered to any man for treachery than that I have held out to me, — even the love of my royal mistress? Does she indeed love me?' he suddenly asked himself. 'That I love her I can no longer question; but may she not have been mocking me? May she not have trifled with my passion, so unpardonably daring as it is; and, the better to win me to put down the rebellion that threatened her throne with annihilation, profess a tender regard for me that she never felt? It may indeed be so. Reason tells me it should be so. But — no, no. My heart tells me better. There was too much sincerity, — too much truth of feeling there! I will believe as my heart, not as my head would.'

With this decision, — for the more he had reflected upon the extraordinary interview he had held with the princess, the more he marvelled, doubted, and questioned, — he ascended the steps to the portico of the ruin, and entered the building. The hall was partly open to the sky, and the light of the moon fell through many a crevice, and between tall columns, upon the tessellated floor, like beams of silver, lighting up the places where it shone with intense brightness, and leaving the remainder of the interior in impenetrable darkness.

With uncertain steps, he picked his way through the central hall, and advanced towards the wing in which the knight said he should be found. The beams of the moon penetrating the gallery into which he entered, through a distant open door, directed his steps, and he pursued his way thither with such speed as was consistent with safety in an unknown and perilous pathway. On coming to the door, he pushed it open, and beheld a sight that filled him with amazement and fear. The room had been formerly the domestic temple dedicated to the tutelary gods of the family. It was large and lofty, ornamented with carved work in stone, and contained a single window, through which the moon shed a brilliant light directly upon an altar beneath it. On this altar was stretched, at full length, like an effigy of steel, upon a

tomb, the Peruvian knight. His hands were crossed upon his breast, and his feet were composed together. His visor was up, and his face was cold and stern and silent as death. Montezuma shuddered; but his gaze rested not long on this spectacle. Beside the altar, and between himself and the knight, he beheld a being, — he knew not whether mortal or spirit, — like a young female. She was of the most wonderful beauty of face, and her symmetrical figure was inconceivably light and elegant, and seemed to swim in the moonbeam rather than tread the earth. Her hair was dark as sable, and floated softly about her pearly shoulders, and her features were shaped with exquisite delicacy. Coal black eye-brows contrasted with the singular brightness of her complexion, and her eyes were large, — very, very large, — and so very, very black, that they seemed to be the hiding-places of Night. Nothing could be more exquisitely formed than her hands and feet, — nothing more graceful than her figure. She was attired in a flowing scarf of silver tissue, with a *milla* of azure silk reaching below the knee. A veil, shining and looking like a wreath of mist, floated about her shoulders. She wore sandals of white *itzli* upon her feet; and in her hair, fastened, he could not see how, an emerald, that bore some device. In her hand she held a light wand, with a gem, of singular color and luminous appearance, at the extremity. As Montezuma entered, she was leaning lightly and gracefully upon it, and gazing upon the prostrate knight, with her profile turned towards him.

He stood, transfixed to the spot, and gazed upon her with surprise and admiration, mingled with superstitious fears. She turned upon him her eyes, which, though so very large and black, were sparkling with light, like the midnight firmament with its stars, and smiled. Yet he thought her look was the most touchingly melancholy he had ever conceived of. She smiled upon him again, rather with her look than her lips, and beckoned him towards her. He obeyed irresistibly, and advanced to the altar. She took his hand in hers, and looked softly up in his face; and he then saw that she wept. He believed her to have been a spirit of moonbeams, till he touched her hand, which was like velvet, and warm with life; but then there was something about her eyes, that he did not think of this world, and her robes and veil, like the wings and plumage of a bird, seemed to be a portion of herself. He was perplexed and bewildered. There were tears in her eyes. They appealed to his heart. They almost convinced him she was a woman. But he doubted, though he felt her pulse throbbing in the hand that held and warmed his. He was about to speak, — for his eyes rested on the recumbent knight, — and he wished to ask wherefore he saw him in this situation. She touched his lips with her wand, and he found speech sealed up in his mouth. He commended himself to the gods in his spirit, and waited the issue.

‘Prince,’ she said, addressing him in a voice of the most thrilling sweetness, such as he had never before listened to, ‘I have long waited for thee.’

Montezuma would have replied to her, that he was not the prince; but he could not move his lips.

‘I have need of thy services. Wilt thou obey me?’ she continued, mournfully fixing her eyes upon his face.

He silently pressed the fingers that held his own.

‘Follow me.’

She moved away with a light, floating motion, as if she used her feet rather to add grace to motion than to sustain her form upon the ground, and

entering a closet, descended a narrow staircase, that led to the vaults beneath the ruin. He followed her in silence; and, although the moonlight did not penetrate the place into which they had entered, he found no difficulty in moving forward, for her form shed a kind of soft light around her, as if the radiance of the moonbeams, in which she had been standing, still lingered about her person. He descended the stone stairs after her, marvelling where this event would end; and, although assured he was led by a being of unearthly nature, curiosity took the place of fear in his bold heart. At the foot of the staircase commenced a labyrinthine gallery, which, with a slight downward inclination, led below the foundations of the palace. In a sort of circular hall at its extremity stood, upon a pedestal, a black marble statue of a knight. She stopped before it; and, turning round to him, spoke for the first time since she had left the upper palace.

'Behold the statue of Nopaltzin, the last monarch of the Mexitili!' she said, fixing upon him, as she spoke, an impressive look.

Montezuma instantly uncovered his head, and knelt reverently before it. She beheld the act of reverence and honor with a countenance expressive of the intensest pleasure.

'The spirit of thy race yet lives in thee,' she cried. 'Thy lips are unsealed!' With these words, she touched his mouth with the reversed end of her wand.

'Wherefore am I conducted hither, fair spirit?' he asked, rising to his feet.

'Knowest thou the fate of this monarch, before whose statue thou hast done reverence?'

'He was the last of a race of kings, whose founder was the celestial Prince of the Sun. He fell by the sword of the first Emperor Aztec, who took possession of his throne, and whose descendant now sits upon it. 'Tis seven centuries since.'

'Thou hast spoken truly, prince,' she said, pleased.

'Nay — I am no prince.'

'Answer me not,' she said, sternly. 'Do I not know thou art — Montezuma, son of Mahco, the net-maker!'

'I am, therefore, a bondman,' he answered bitterly.

'Dost thou love thy bondage?'

'Am I not a man — a descendant of the free Mexitilians? Seven centuries have not extinguished the memory of the glory of our ancestors.'

'This is the language that I would hear from thy lips. Come with me, and I will show thee thy destiny — that thou mayest have confidence towards her whom thou lovest.'

'Ha! do you know this?' he asked, with surprise.

She made no reply for a moment, and then said to him in a solemn voice,

'Montezuma, the genius of thy country and of thy race hath been awakened this night. The end of the Aztec race is nigh! A prince from the loins of Nopaltzin shall within seven days sit upon the throne of the empire, and the Mexitili shall be free.'

'Doth the princess die then?' he demanded, with painful interest.

'Nay — but what I say will, nevertheless, come to pass.'

'There lives none of the royal race of Acolhuan, that once ruled the empire of the Mexitili,' he said, with surprise.

Nopaltzin had a son who escaped his father's fate, and fled to Xaltocan. He hath a descendant living, who shall restore the dynasty.'

'Who is he? Nay — it cannot be.'

'If it were true,' she said, with a smile, looking steadily in his face, 'wouldst thou resign thy hopes — in love — dethrone the princess, and with thy hand place him on the throne of his fathers?'

Montezuma was silent. He knew not what to reply. He loved the princess — but he had never thought of any thing beyond the happiness of her love. His thoughts had never aspired to union with her! — the idea of sharing the throne with her never once occurred to him. When he looked forward in the future, he beheld her, in imagination, sole Empress, himself her humble, secret worshipper. The ambition of the throne had never mingled with his pure, adoring love. He therefore felt no rivalry roused by the words of the beautiful creature who so closely questioned him. He felt that, so far as he himself was concerned, his love for his country, his devotion to the memory of the early monarchs of his enslaved race, would induce him freely to lay down his life to restore one of their blood to the sceptre. But he felt for the Princess Eylla! His imagination could not picture her dethronement without pain, not that he would have loved her less were she to fall to the degree of the lowest maiden of the land. He was troubled by the question put to him, and was silent.

'Thy love struggles with thy honor,' she said seriously, yet without reproof.

'T is true, sweet lady,' he said, with emotion. 'If I had never seen the princess, I would lay down my life to restore the dynasty of my race.'

'What if I should put thy love for thy country's glory to the test,' she said, severely, 'and bid thee seek its good to the sacrifice of thy love for the princess!'

'Nay — I implore thee!' he cried, distressed. 'I feel thy power! I know thou art a creature of the spirit world! But thy look is gentle, and thy sweet voice hath no key of cruelty in its tones! Spare me the trial, I pray thee!'

'Mexitlian! — Thou art not worthy,' she cried, her eyes kindling with fearful light, and her brow growing black with anger.

He bowed his head before this expression of her fierce and sudden displeasure, and deprecated her wrath. 'Pardon me!' he cried, submissively, and with a voice of heavy sorrow.

'Love hath made thee recreant,' she said. Alas! I did hope the memory of the glory of the Mexitlian race yet lingered in thy breast, when I saw thee bow down in profound reverence before this statue of thy last monarch! I have tried thee, and found thee wanting! Go! continue slaves! Henceforth the gods shall blot out thy once proud name, and the remembrance of thy kingly glory, from the nations!'

'Spare me! Forgive, offended spirit! I yield!' he cried, fervently.

'Wilt thou sacrifice thy love for the princess for the restoration of thy country's former glory, in the person of the living descendant of the Acolhuan race of kings?'

'I have seen my error! I will make the sacrifice,' he said, firmly, as if the struggle had passed, and the noblest principle had conquered.

'Swear it by the sacred gods thou worshippest and fearest!' she said, with an energy that startled and awed him.

'I swear!' he repeated, lifting his hand to the heavens.

'Now lay thy right hand upon the thigh of this statue of thy king, and pledge thyself, that, forgetting all other earthly loves and honors, thou wilt

place upon the throne, from which he was hurled, one of his own race, even if the blood of the last child of the Aztec usurpers should be shed by thy hand in doing it.'

'I swear it!' he said, solemnly, placing his right hand upon the statue.

'*Thou art worthy!*' she cried, with the deepest intensity of joy and feeling; 'through thee the gods will restore the empire of thy people!'

Montezuma replied not. He stood sad and stern! He had made a sacrifice dearer to him than life. But his country — the hope the singular being in whose presence he stood, had held out to him — the restoration of the glorious dynasty of a race that had been for centuries in bondage! he felt he would be unworthy of the love he sacrificed, if he let it stand between him and his country. He was sad, but firm. He had made the sacrifice, and the pain was past. His heart bled, but he strove to hide, if not heal, the wound, by the contemplation of the restored glory of the ancient empire. Of the truth and certainty of the bright maiden's words, he had no doubt. He felt that he was in the presence of one of those beings, whom both religion and tradition had told him were the spiritual guardians of the races of kings. But his thoughts dwelt upon the individual to whose services he had so solemnly bound himself. That a descendant of the kings should be alive was most incredible and extraordinary.

'Montezuma,' she said, in a gentle tone, and with a look of gratitude and pride, 'you have proved yourself worthy to restore the sceptre of the Princes of the Sun. You have sacrificed to your country the dearest object of a man's heart. You have shown yourself a true Mexitlian, and the shades of the exiled princes, for seven centuries, shall do you homage for the honor you have bestowed upon their long degraded race!'

'Who is this prince, that thou dost need my poor aid to replace him in the seat of his fathers?' he asked, with curiosity.

'Thou shalt behold him,' she said, solemnly, and in a commanding manner. 'Stand thou there, and fix thine eyes upon the statue. Neither move nor speak at what thou seest!'

He stood a few paces from the altar or pedestal on which was the statue, and, with feelings of expectant awe, fixed his eyes upon it. She then approached the statue, and touched it with her wand. It instantly received life, and stepping from the pedestal, walked slowly past him, saying, as it came opposite,

'Hail, Montezuma the First! restored to the throne of thy ancestors! Blessed of gods and of men! My expiation is finished!'

He then walked with a slow and majestic motion towards the opposite side of the place, and passing through a door that opened into the tombs of the Axuzco family, disappeared from his appalled and wondering vision. He turned to ask her for an explanation of his words, when, to his amazement, he beheld upon the pedestal a second statue. It was that of a young man in the garb of a peasant; but his features and air were noble, and resembled those of the first statue. His face was haggard, and his brow worn with care. Upon his head was a cap similar to those still worn by the peasantry of Xaltocan. She lightly touched him with her wand, and he descended from the pedestal, and walked across the gallery before Montezuma.

'Hail, Montezuma the First!' he said, with a smile of triumph. 'The sceptre of my father, Nopaltzin, cruelly snatched from me, 't is thy destiny to restore!'

With these words, the melancholy shade of the exiled prince crossed the

floor, and disappeared after the king. Montezuma looked again, and a third statue stood upon the pedestal. It was that of an old man in the garb of a fisherman. At the motion of her wand he descended to the ground, and passed slowly before the youth. His features were noble, and bore the likeness of the royal race of Alcohuan. He waved his hand, and bent his venerable head in homage as he passed by, but spoke not. Like the others, he disappeared in the tombs.

A fourth statue, that of a robber-chief, occupied the pedestal. His brow was fierce, and his bearing bold and reckless. As, obedient to her wand, he descended to the floor, his armor rang through the vaulted passage, and as he crossed the paved gallery, his step was firm and strong.

'Hail, Montezuma the First! may the gods give to thee the sceptre they denied to me.'

A fifth statue appeared in his place. It was that of a slave in chains. As he passed before the young man, he said,

'Hail, Montezuma! Thou art the liberator of thy race! Hail, son of Nopaltzin!'

He also passed forward into the tombs, which had received, one after the other, those who had preceded him. His place upon the pedestal was occupied by a waterman, in the garb of the Mexitlian serfs; his by an artizan; his by a foot-soldier; and then followed a long series of bondmen and artificers, all of whose countenances bore the strong likeness of the race of Alcohuan kings. At length an old man stood upon the pedestal, with flowing white hair, and clad in the blue scarf and cap of the bondmen of the city. In his hand he held a broken net. Montezuma trembled with surprise. He recognised his grandfather. The old man descended from the pedestal at the touch of the beautiful being who had so wonderfully called back the dead of centuries, in all the characteristics of their various conditions when living, and slowly approached him.

'Hail, Montezuma! Thy virtues, in loving thy country above the idol of thy heart, hath redeemed the curse upon our race! The gods have given to thee the sceptre of thy fathers!'

He spoke, and passed on, leaving Montezuma petrified with astonishment. Another statue stood upon the pedestal. It was his father! Montezuma now recognised in him the likeness to Nopaltzin that had distinguished them all. He knelt with awe before what his heart told him was his father's shade! His eyes fell upon the beautiful being who had conjured him before him, as if he would ask if his father were indeed dead. But her look awed him to silence. The old man descended from the pedestal, and laid his hand upon his son's head, as he still knelt. It chilled him with its icy coldness.

'Montezuma! The gods have revealed to me what I knew not living. Thou art the last of the royal line of the Mexitlian kings! Thou shalt sit upon the throne of thy fathers! All hail, Montezuma the First!'

The young man followed him with his eyes, as he slowly disappeared, and then fell upon his face, overcome with the spectacle he had witnessed. The voice of the spirit-being restored him to himself.

'Behold, Montezuma! What further seest thou?'

He looked up, and beheld two figures, not statues or shades, like those that had gone before, standing upon the pedestal. They were male and female, arrayed in royal robes, with diadems upon their heads, and each having a hand resting upon a sceptre, which a black eagle above their heads was presenting to them in his beak. Could it be! The female was none

other than the Princess Eylla! His heart leaped with delight. He would have bounded forward, but was awed by the majesty of her beauty. He who stood beside her as emperor, was of a noble and commanding presence, and bore upon his youthful features the characteristic impress of the race of the ancient Mexitlian kings. But he knew him not. He would have asked, and turned towards the fair spirit for this purpose, when she touched the pedestal, and the attitude and costumes of the figures changed! It was the princess again, in her evening robe. The youth, in the very garb he himself wore in her boudoir, when he knelt and declared his love, was now kneeling at her feet. It was *himself*. She waved her wand over the figures, and they disappeared from his sight.

Lost in wonder and admiration, he continued to gaze upon the spot where had been so singularly unfolded to him the past and the future, when she laid her hand lightly upon his arm.

'Dost thou believe?' she asked, impressively.

'I do,' he answered, with deep emotion.

'Then shalt thou become emperor of Mexico; but thou must *win* the crown by a *trial* of endurance; thou must undergo that will call for all thy courage, patience, and faith in my prediction. The gods *devise*, but thou must *execute*.'

'I will go through the task,' he answered, resolutely.

'I have shown this vision to thee to strengthen and confirm thy love,' she said, 'and also to reward thy virtue. Thou hast both thy country and thy princess, because thou wert willing to sacrifice the love of the one for the glory of the other. Hadst thou refused, thou wouldst have lost both. Such ever is the reward the gods render to virtue. Follow me; my spirit faints for light. Darkness is death to one of my nature. Be secret in what has been revealed to thee.'

She led the way again towards the upper part of the palace, her form emitting the same soft, misty halo, but far less bright and clear than at first, that had guided them.

It would be difficult to describe the emotions and feelings of Montezuma, as he traversed the passage. He felt that he was the object of supernatural interest, and could not but believe the truth of the extraordinary revelations he had heard and witnessed. He soon succeeded in reducing his intensely wrought mind to some degree of composure, and, placing faith in all that he had seen, devoutly thanked the gods. But he thanked them most devoutly, that he had not to sacrifice the princess' love. Was he indeed the descendant of the Mexitlian kings? He could not question it. He had seen and heard speak, the shades of all his ancestors, from the last monarch down to his father's! His father's? 'Can my father be dead?' he asked himself.

At this moment they came to the closet above, adjoining the room in which he had left the knight. The altar was visible, with the moonlight still streaming in through the casement upon the mailed knight stretched upon it.

'Prince!' she said, ere they entered, 'again seal thy lips as to what thou hast seen.'

'I obey,' he said, fervently. 'Does my father live?'

'Thou art the sole and last of thy race. Thus the gods willed it,' she answered solemnly.

'Alas, my father!'

'This is no time to mourn. If thou hast lost a father, thou hast gained a throne. Enter, and lay thy hand upon the knight's breast.'

'Wherefore lieth he so? And what hath the house of Axusco to do with the kings of Alcohuan?'

'Thou hast well asked. The nobles of the Axusco family were ever the ministers and defenders of their throne. Like the faithful *quelen*, that flies with the eagle, and expires when he dies, as if its life were in him, the Axuscan lords reigned and fell with their princes. It becomes the restored prince to have an Axuscan lord, like his fathers before him, to be the guide and council of his throne.'

'But, methinks the knight lies dead,' said Montezuma, advancing towards the altar.

The beautiful spirit-being at the same time, with an air of languor and fatigue, stood panting in the flood of moonlight, with parted lips and heaving bosom, as if refreshing and bathing herself in its beams, after her long absence from it in the dark passages beneath the palace. Montezuma looked upon her with wondering curiosity and awe; but she was too lovely and gentle to create in his bosom any thing like fear. In a moment afterwards, she stepped out from the moonlight, with a sparkling eye and elastic step, and with a fresher and brighter radiance of light shining from her person.

'The knight hath been dead seven centuries,' she answered.

'I saw him at sundown,' answered Montezuma, with surprise.

'Come hither. What seest thou?' she asked, leading him to a recess on one side of the apartment.

Upon the steps of a pedestal, where had once stood a statue of the god Huitziltli, now lying broken upon the floor, sat the counterpart of the figure stretched upon the altar. He was leaning his head upon his sword, and seemed buried in profound thought.

'Tis the knight himself!' exclaimed Montezuma, with surprise and pleasure. 'Who, then, is yonder effigy?'

'The minister who sat at the right hand of king Nopaltzin, and was slain by his side when he was dethroned.'

'Tis wondrous strange. And the gods have preserved this line, too, with the kingly?' inquired Montezuma, most deeply interested.

'Else would not the throne be as it was. What the gods ordain, will never fail of the minutest accomplishment.'

'He seems buried in deep meditation. Perhaps he sleeps.'

'No. He beholds now in vision what thou hast seen with the eye, and heard with the ear.'

'The wondrous vision of my ancestors?'

'Tis passing in his brain.'

'Knoweth he his own descent, or hath he lost it, as my fathers did.'

'There lies he who was called the lord of Axusco, seven centuries ago, and this knight thus calls himself. He hath not lost his descent, nor the memory of his former glory. The conquerors of thy kings kept the family near their throne, to humor the enslaved people with the semblance of power in one of their own nobles. But the Aztec princes have ever been watchful of them. Thou seest the last knight hath had his palace laid in ruins, and himself exiled. The vision hath passed. Ho! sir knight. Sleepest thou at such a time?'

The lord of Axusco sprang to his feet, and looked about him for an instant, ere he realized his situation. His gaze then rested upon Montezuma, and

he instantly knelt at his feet, and placed his sword upon the ground before him.

'My noble prince! behold your servant. My sword and my life are yours.'

'Nay, brave knight; this posture becometh thee not towards me,' said Montezuma, with embarrassment, at this confirmation of his assurance of his true position.

'Thou art the favorite son of Heaven. The gods have revealed to me the past and future as I slept, waiting for thy coming hither,' answered the knight.

'Such hath been revealed to me by this bright being. Ah! she hath vanished,' he cried, looking for the guardian spirit of his house, who had disappeared in the direction of the altar, the instant the knight opened his eyes. 'Yes, noble knight, I do feel,' he said, with firm and lofty confidence, that became his high descent, — 'I do feel that I am of the royal race of the Mexitlian kings. Henceforth I fix my eyes upon the throne of my fathers.'

'Beware thou betray not thyself till the time be come to fulfil the will of heaven. Till then thou art Montezuma the serf!' said, commandingly, the spirit-maiden, appearing before them.

'Do I wake or sleep?' cried the knight, with alarmed surprise. 'I did behold this same bright being in my vision.'

'Thou art awake, brave lord,' said the sweet, thrilling voice of the wondrous maiden. 'Within seven days, shall the decrees of heaven concerning thy emperor be accomplished. Till then, farewell! noble prince. Farewell! noble lord of Axusco.'

With these words, she retired backwards towards the broad moon-beam, and standing in it, waved her wand towards the moon, upon which she fixed her large, glorious eyes, and slowly dissolved into its light. Montezuma and the knight, recovering from their surprise, approached the spot. But the pure beam of light, that lay upon the cold marble, betrayed nothing of the presence of the bright being it had united with its own ethereal substance.

While they were wondering at all this, a strain of enchanting melody, yet of the most melancholy and touching kind, floated in the air around them.

'Look! Behold!' cried the knight, pointing towards the altar.

Montezuma turned at his voice, and beheld the ancient lord of Axusco, whom they had seen recumbent, standing upright upon the altar, with his sword in his right hand, and his shield on his left arm. The soft melody seemed to be floating above him in the air, from some invisible musician. Suddenly it became wild and martial, and rang so clear, that the blood thrilled in their veins. The statue, at the same instant, struck his shield thrice with his sword, and then, descending from the altar, advanced towards Montezuma.

'Emperor and king! all hail!' he cried, in a voice of exultation. 'The glory of the empire of thy fathers shall be revived in thee.'

Then, approaching the Peruvian knight, he knelt before him, and in silence laid his shield and sword at his feet.

'Lord of Axusco, defend thy king!' he said, in a solemn and commanding tone. He then rose, and passing by, crossed the chamber towards the altar, and disappeared near it, they knew not how. At the same instant, the music ceased.

The knight took up the sword and shield, and laying them upon the altar, cried, in a loud voice,

'My brave and noble ancestors, wherever thou art, I do solemnly pledge myself, before this sacred altar of the god of our house, to obey thy commands. May the gods recompense me, as I am true or false!'

He then broke his own sword upon the altar, cast the fragments at the foot of it, and, taking up that of his ancestor, devoutly kissed it, and girded it to his side.

'Twas heaven that guided thee hither from Peru, brave knight,' said Montezuma. 'Let us embrace, for our fathers' sakes, and patiently wait its further guidance.'

At this moment, the loud tramp of horses was heard in the court of the palace, rapidly approaching the main entrance. The next instant, they saw, from the window, three cavaliers alight from their steeds, and hasten up the ruined steps of the portico.

'What means this?' cried the knight, with surprise. 'Yonder comes into the court, also, some score men-at-arms, at the top of their speed.'

Ere Montezuma could reply, the voice of the young lord Esquilt was heard, giving directions to guard every avenue of the palace.

'This is their rendezvous,' he said to those with him, 'and they should be found here.'

'Something hath transpired that menaces us with evil, sir,' said Montezuma.

'They are but three,' said the knight. 'Here they come.'

The party of cavaliers, as he spoke, entered the apartment. The eye of the young noble immediately fell upon them, and, in a stern voice, he commanded them to surrender.

'To whom?' inquired Montezuma, calmly.

'To the emperor,' answered the noble, haughtily.

'My lord of Esquilt,' said Montezuma, 'I have done my best to put down this spirit of revolt.'

'As thou hast done thy best to kindle it. Thou art a rebel, — and who is he with thee? Surrender, both!'

'I shall surrender to them, my lord,' said Montezuma. 'It is best it should be so; for I perceive the gods will bring good out of it. But act thou for thyself.'

The knight made no reply, but dropped his visor over his features, covered his breast with his shield, and advancing the point of his sword, walked boldly past them into the hall of the palace, cut his way ere they could prevent him through the men-at-arms at the entrance, and, leaping into his saddle, galloped out of the court into the narrow street, and disappeared, the sound of his horse's hoofs growing fainter and fainter in the distance, till they died away altogether.

'A bold knight!' cried Esquilt, 'if knight he be; but I have seen so many valiant serfs in borrowed plumage, I scarce know hawk from buzzard. Dost thou give thy arms, fair sir?' he asked of Montezuma, seeing him stand quietly by.

'I am thy prisoner,' answered Montezuma, who saw resistance, had he been disposed to make it, against four knights cased in armor and a score of men-at-arms, would be vain.

'Where are the rest of thy fellow-conspirators? Methinks I saw some half dozen more at the net-maker's, than have been captured.'

'They have gone to their homes. Whom else hast thou captured? And why do you take prisoners, now that the revolt is quieted, and the princess hath granted amnesty?'

'Quieted! Yes, with the slaughter of some two thousand rebels,' answered the young noble.

'Two thousand men slain! Hath there been bloodshed? Hath the revolt, then, broken out?'

'Yes. Heard you not the tocsin of alarm? Saw you not the signal-fire from the summit of the Temple of War? Where were thine eyes and ears, sir rebel?'

The sound of alarm and the flame of the altar had both alike been unheard and unseen by him while in the subterranean galleries of the palace. 'Who was the leader and mover of this, my lord?' he asked eagerly.

'A certain hunchback, with the eye of a woman, the soul of a warrior, and the heart of Michtlan, the evil one.'

'T is Hucha! I feared it. Hath the revolt been put down, my lord?'

'It did but want this consummation,' said the young noble, receiving Montezuma's sword. 'I am sorry for thee, fair youth, that thy success was not equal to thy wishes, in this matter. Thou didst, 't is true, use fair words and a princess' promise, to put it down. But they will little avail thee with the emperor. I knew not so much of the spirit of cavaliers existed in your class as I have witnessed this night. I shall hold in better favor thy degree henceforward. 'Men-at-arms! guard your prisoner to the castle keep. Thou wilt be judged by the emperor, sir rebel, who I fear me will make thee, and also thy friend the hunchback, shorter by the head ere to-morrow's sun set.

With these words, the lord Esquitl returned to the outside of the palace, and mounted his horse and rode away, accompanied by all his friends, save one, who remained with the men-at-arms; while Montezuma, strictly guarded by them, was conducted a prisoner to the imperial castle, which adjoined the palace of the emperor.

CHAPTER VI.

SISMARQUI IN THE PALACE.

WHEN Sismarqui left his companions at the foot of the palace stairs, he followed the terrace round the base of the tower, until he came to the postern door, through which the prince had conveyed Fatziza into the palace. From his previous knowledge of the wing occupied by the Prince Palipan, he knew that it must lead toward his rooms. He attempted to force it open, but in vain. Burning with impatience and disappointment, he was about to dash against it a fragment of rock that lay upon the terrace, when a different mode of ingress occurred to him.

'Why should I prepare the prince, by a rude and noisy assault, for my coming?' he said; 'this disguise will, with address and boldness, bring me sooner to my object. I will try its virtue, as I first contemplated. May the gods guide me!'

With these words he rapidly retraced his steps, and returning to the lemon-walk, followed it towards its termination, at the foot of the steps leading to the battlement, where Elic had been posted as sentinel. A slight knowl-

edge of the interior of the palace, which he had occasionally visited to carry shields to courtiers, was sufficient to show him that these stairs would give him access to its courts and galleries, and open the way for him to approach the apartments of the prince. The chief difficulty was to pass the guard on the battlements. With a firm step he advanced from the shaded avenue towards them, when, to his surprise, he beheld a sentinel stationed at their post. It was unusual, and the circumstance convinced him that the emperor had intimation of the revolt, and was prepared for surprise. He hesitated an instant, and then, assuming the gait and bearing of the prince, he approached.

'Stand!' challenged the soldier, sternly, as the young man advanced from the shadow towards him.

'Thou art keeping strict guard to-night, soldier,' he said, in a composed tone of voice. 'This vigilance is well.'

'The prince!' exclaimed the soldier respectfully; and lowering his pike, which he had presented to his breast.

'Thou shouldst know me, methinks! Who hath stationed thee here?'

'The lieutenant of the emperor's guard.'

'Gave he no countersign to thee?'

'T is "*The Emperor*," noble prince!'

'What is thy name?'

'Nezal; a soldier of thy own body guard.'

'I do now see thou wearest my insignia. I will remember it, for I may need thy services soon!'

With these words Sismarqui passed him and ascended to the battlement. On landing upon it he was not a little startled at seeing several soldiers standing at the opposite extremity, and two sentinels on guard at the entrance of the gallery of armor, that led to the interior of the palace. He hesitated an instant, but the object he had before him gave him confidence, and he walked steadily across the battlement towards the sentries. One of these was Elic, who, believing it to be the prince, did not challenge him, but said, as he came near,

'Noble prince! the man whom you bade me arrest, hath not yet appeared.'

'I bade thee arrest no one,' said Sismarqui, wishing to draw from him who was under the displeasure of the prince.

'A mascal of the palace, whom your highness said was in disguise.'

'Thou mayest arrest as many mascales as thou choosetest for me. When did the prince — that is, when did I give you this order?'

'Not an hour since, as you went forth.'

'True. See thou arrest him. And hark you! if you or thy fellow-soldier here see any one calling himself the prince, passing here, arrest him also! There is one so disguised within the palace, and I would have him seized.'

'It shall be done, your highness.'

'There is masquerading here to-night, methinks, with disguised mascales and princes,' said Elic, as Sismarqui proceeded at a quick pace along the gallery towards the rotunda of columns, from which the various avenues of the palace diverged. He had not advanced but a few paces before his steps were arrested by an imploring cry from the post behind him.

'Noble prince, save me! I am the true Castipiti!' He turned, and beheld struggling in the hands of the guard, one in the dress of the steward of the palace. 'Save me, prince! I am no impostor!'

'Thou art!' cried Elic, 'and I have orders to arrest thee.'

'I did but come hither from my room by this private door that leadeth to the emperor's wine cellars, to ask thee, Elic, who knowest me well, if I am so altered that my companions and intimates do know me not. I cannot sleep. The gods have cursed me!'

'Thou art an impostor, and we arrest thee by the prince's orders,' answered both sentinels.

'Save me, noble prince!' cried the maschal imploringly.

Sismarqui, apprehensive that his object might be defeated by any disturbance at such a crisis, turned back and said,

'Thou hast doubtless made a mistake, soldier. Release him!'

'Nay, your highness,' said Elic; 'he is an impostor. Yonder comes the true maschal, now!'

While he was speaking, Casipeti the waterman, habited precisely like the prisoner Elic held by the throat, was seen approaching the spot on his way out of the palace, after successfully accomplishing his purpose in retiring into it. On beholding the scene he would have gone back, but, finding that he was observed, boldly came forward.

'Thou hast got the rogue, then, brave soldiers,' he cried, advancing with a confident step. 'Hold him fast! Ha! my noble prince!' he added, on discovering Sismarqui; and he bent his head in the lowest reverence.

Sismarqui started at his voice, and fixed his eyes upon him with a curiosity he could not account for to himself.

'Your highness, I am indeed myself, and none other. He is the impostor that hath haunted me like the evil Michtlan in my shape.'

'There cannot be two stewards,' answered Sismarqui, desirous of escaping without further delay or notice. 'He, whom thou shalt judge the true one, release, and hold the other.'

'Your highness judge between us,' said Casipeti the waterman. 'We both claim to be Casipeti, the king's steward.'

'If he be Casipeti, your highness,' said the maschal, 'he is the waterman, who, of late, struck a noble.'

'Come hither into the moonlight, and let me see thy face,' said Sismarqui to the disguised bondman. 'I think I should know that voice.'

The waterman obeyed, and no sooner did Sismarqui behold his composed features, than he recognized them.

Ha! why art thou here, Casipeti? I thought thou wert with our friends!' he said, forgetting his disguise.

'I do not understand your highness,' he answered, with surprise, at these words. 'If I am the true Casipeti, I pray your highness detain the other, and let me pass without hindrance.'

'Thou art the true Casipeti, I'll be sworn,' said Sismarqui, and thy presence here is of value to me, if thou wilt befriend me.'

'I beg your highness would permit me to depart,' prayed Casipeti, alarmed lest he should be detained.

'Nay, look at me!' said the prince, in a low tone. With these words, he turned towards the light, and lifted his visor. 'Dost thou know me?'

'Sismarqui!' cried the waterman, with surprise and pleasure.

'I am. Fatziza hath, within the half hour been borne away to the palace by the prince. He left his plume and cloak behind him on the floor, by which I knew who had wronged me. I have assumed them to cover my attempt to rescue her. Wilt thou aid me?'

'With all my heart. I know the direction of the prince's chambers. I came hither under this garb, to ascertain the temper of the emperor's guards for rebellion.'

'Retain thy disguise, then. It will aid us. This poor mascal must be placed under arrest till our end is obtained. So, soldiers,' he said, turning towards them, and speaking sternly, 'this is the true Casipeti, whose services I need. Place thy prisoner in custody till morning, and if thou hast then no further orders from me, let him go! A night's occupation of the guard-room will be sufficient punishment.'

'Look ye, friend,' said Casipeti, going up to him, as the soldiers were leading him off, 'I owe you a kindness, and, to relieve thy mind, lest thou shouldst believe thyself under magic, I will charitably tell thee that thou art the true mascal Casipeti, and that I am Casipeti the waterman. I trust we shall know each other better hereafter.'

'Ho! guards! prince! soldiers! ho, all honest men! Seize him — the villain! He has confessed!' shouted the mascal, enraged.

'Heed him not, good friends, he hath a madness in him,' said Casipeti, following Sismarqui, who had by this time advanced some distance along the gallery.

'Thou shalt confess, thou rogue,' said Elic, 'when thou art brought before the prince in the morning.'

'Alas! alas! I am a miserable man,' said the mascal, dropping his head upon his breast, and weeping. 'Do with me what thou wilt!'

Thus desponding and overcome, the hapless steward surrendered himself to his fate.

'Your highness, — nay, I did forget, for thy princely costume and bearing,' said the waterman, as they traversed the gallery; 'brave Sismarqui, I should have said —'

'Thou wert right, Casipeti. Till Fatziza be rescued, I am prince to thee, and thou the mascal to me. We must maintain our characters with our lives, if need be; for all may depend on the disguises we have assumed. What wouldst thou have said?'

'That the emperor hath plainly heard some rumor or direct intelligence of the revolt, for, as I passed through the palace, I met knights and couriers passing to and from his cabinet with hasty and important tread. Hast thou seen Montezuma?'

'I have, and his influence hath dispersed the people. But I fear the armorer's quarter may be in motion, for as I should have gone thither, I heard the fatal news of Fatziza's abduction by the prince. Haste thee! One moment may be too late for aught save vengeance! Knowest thou the way to the prince's rooms?'

'I have, favored by my disguise, been studying the interior throughout, and learning the position of the various departments and their occupants, looking to some day when it might be useful, even if the present insurrection pass by.'

'Thou hast done well. Lead me to the apartments of the prince!'

'Thou must compose thy step in crossing the rotunda before us, where thou seest a few courtiers stand in waiting before the emperor's door, and I will walk a pace behind thee. Keep on to yonder flight of marble steps, guarded by two bronzed lions, and pursue thy way across a court beyond, in which thou wilt see a vast silver serpent, spouting jets of water, that fall around him into a marble basin, into which he seems to swim. Beyond it,

thou wilt see, beneath a portico of porphyry, three broad steps of alabaster, leading to a door, the leaves of which are ivory. They lead to the ante-room of the prince's chamber. Proceed first; I will follow thee.'

With a beating heart, lest, with all his haste and caution, he should be too late to save the maiden, the lover advanced before him along the steel-hung gallery, and entered the circular hall of columns. Two or three cavaliers, in rich dresses, were leaning against the pillars, as if weary of their attendance, and one or two others were walking to and fro before the emperor's door, in light, laughing conversation. As they entered, and were crossing the place, one of them, after saluting the royal plume that waved above Sismarqui's helm, touched Casipeti on the shoulder.

'Stay, good mascal! Let the prince proceed; he wanteth not thee.'

'He hath commanded my attendance, lords,' answered Casipeti, impatiently, as Sismarqui, seemingly forgetful of all but Fatziza, ascended alone the marble steps towards the court of the silver serpent.

'Where is thy counterpart, or art thou he?'

'I pray you, my lords, let me pass on. I have been too much detained to-night already.'

'Thou shalt go on one condition, which will prove whether thou art Casipeti or not Casipeti,' said the young lord, holding him by his tunic.

'Name it, my lord.'

'Bring us presently hither a flask of the emperor's Pimerian wine!'

'It shall be done.'

'Stay — thou mayest add to it a bunch of Teuctli raisins, and some clusters of purple grapes!'

'It shall be done, my lord,' he said, following Sismarqui.

'Then haste. Ha! pretty Tzitzis,' cried the youth, 'whither art thou flying, with so wild an eye?' he asked, as he beheld the maiden at this instant make her appearance at the entrance of the rotunda.

'I am hastening to the rooms of the Lord Cuiiri, Lord Tlanotl!' she said, passing him.

'He leans against yonder column, half asleep, or deeply meditating.

She flew towards him.

'My lord!' and the Peruvian laid her hand upon his arm.

'Is it thou, Tzitzis!'

'The princess!'

'What of her?' he demanded, alarmed by her breathless manner.

'She hath present need of thy services. Hasten to her!'

Without a word the young noble obeyed, and Tzitzis disappeared within the apartments of the emperor.

'What means this?' demanded the young lords of each other.

'She hath a message to the emperor too! Events are in the air. Ha, mascal! why dost thou linger?' cried one of them, seeing Casipeti, who had been struck with the alarmed manner of the messenger of the princess, and lingered to see the result. 'Go, and do our bidding.'

He continued on his way, but lingered again when he reached the court of the fountain, on seeing the hurried departure of the noble she had spoken to, suspecting the message might have some connection with the object of Sismarqui's visit to the prince's rooms. After waiting a few seconds longer, he was about to proceed, for he saw that Sismarqui had crossed the court in the wrong direction, and was looking back for him, at a loss which way to proceed. But his first step was arrested by a hand on his shoulder. It was

the Tlascalan whom he had seen by the dwelling of the net-maker. He was in haste and alarm.

'Ha, mascal! thou art well here. Give me thy cap and tunic!'

Ere Casipeti could divine his purpose or resist, the Tlascalan had snatched the cap and torn the flowing robe from him, and fled with them, leaving him, save an embroidered vesture, in his costume of a waterman. At the same instant, the Lord of Cuiri reappeared, coming towards the rotunda, and, fearing lest he should be detected, either by him or by those below, if he crossed the court in his present garb, he, with angry alarm, cast aside the vest from his person, and withdrew within the shadow of a statue.

'What hath happened, my lord?' asked the gay youth who had despatched Casipeti for the wine, as the noble returned.

'Nothing of moment,' he answered, with composure, so that all heard him. 'Come thou aside with me,' he added, in a low tone of voice. His face was flushed, and his voice stern. 'Can I trust thee, Lord Tlanot?' he asked, impressively.

'To death,' answered the young man, grasping his hand warmly.

'The prince hath attempted the life of the princess with an otol flower!'

'Hath it succeeded?' cried the noble, with intense surprise and consternation.

'Not on her life, but her slave's. She hath commanded me to arrest him secretly.'

'I will aid thee.'

'Go to the battlements, and march privately, by the passage in the rear of the emperor's apartments, a guard of four trusty men-at-arms, whom thou wilt select. I will meet thee in the court of the silver serpent, near the steps of the prince's apartments.'

'He hath just gone to them, armed and cloaked, as if he had been abroad. The prince hath indeed attempted her life! It was rumored, this evening, she hath given him ill reception of late.'

'Delay not. Be secret and speedy. I would arrest him in his rooms, as 't is the princess' desire it should be done without noise. Haste, but show to these no signs of haste.'

The young noble left him, and leisurely crossing the hall of columns, disappeared.

'Hath aught happened, my lord?' asked one of the elder cavaliers, advancing.

'Nothing of moment, my good lord; the alarm was most in the Peruvian's manner. A slight matter will frighten maidens.'

'I do rejoice. I did fear some evil had befallen our noble mistress,' he said, with grateful feeling.

'The gods have the Princess Eylla's life in their own keeping, my Lord of Oznenetl,' answered Lord Cuiri. 'My lord, I may want your aid, and as you have experience, it were best I took you with me.'

'Command me,' answered the old cavalier.

'Come with me to the prince's apartments. I have some order from the princess, that will lead me thither presently.'

'The princess hath not of late done the prince such courtesy, for, methinks, in their intercourse, for cousins, and betrothed as they are, they are full distant.'

'Thou wilt soon learn the nature of her courtesy. Come, my lord!'

With these words the young noble, followed by the gray-headed cavalier,

ascended the lion-guarded steps of white marble, and entered the court of the fountain. Casipeti withdrew within the shadow as they passed, without their perceiving him, saved from detection only by the dark hue of his waterman's dress. Anxious for the success and safety of Sismarqui, anxious for himself, exposed as he was to instant discovery, he followed them with his eyes until they were hidden from his view on the other side of the fountain, and then began to devise some means to extricate himself from his perilous situation. He remained at least ten minutes in a state of uncertainty and irresolution, aware that detection would be followed by instant death, after the deception he had practised under the guise which had been so singularly stripped from him. Nevertheless, he at length made up his mind to fly across the rotunda, and escape by speed along the gallery of armor, rush past the sentinel on the battlements, and either effect his escape, or lose his life in the attempt. He knew that, in his present situation, he could be of no further use to Sismarqui, but rather endanger his safety. When he had come to this desperate resolution, and was about to put it into effect, he beheld approaching, from the quarter which he knew led to the princess' apartments, the Emperor himself, and the Princess Eylla leaning upon him. They were preceded by a slave, bearing, in golden candlesticks, two brilliant torches. Their step was quick and decided, and their faces were both strongly marked with intense feeling. They crossed the angle of the court in which Casipeti stood concealed, and passed by towards a lofty door that opened into a suite of gorgeous apartments, which he knew were once occupied by the empress, and known as the empress' wing. They were both silent and thoughtful. He saw the princess, as she passed, cast an anxious and impatient glance in the direction of the prince's part of the palace, and then continue on her way, with a sterner countenance than he could have believed so lovely a face could wear. A few paces behind them, walking at a sad and thoughtful pace, came the Peruvian. He instantly recognised her as the maiden who had extricated him from the group in the rotunda, after his meeting with the maschal. A ray of hope flashed upon him. She came within a few feet of him, as he stood within the shadow of one of the polished columns of the colonnade that environed the court, and he stepped lightly forth, after she had passed by, and gently touched her veil. She turned quickly, and the waterman knelt at her feet.

'Kind maiden, fear me not! Nay, call no one! I am at thy mercy.'

'Who art thou?'

'I was the maschal whom thou didst do a kindness some two hours since. My life is again in thy hands.'

'Art thou the friend of Montezuma?'

'I am, maiden.'

'Then for my mistress' sake, I will do thee a kindness, if thou needest it. Where is thy disguise, and what hadst thou to do with usurping the honors of the unhappy maschal?'

'I came hither in the disguise, maiden, by Montezuma's request. A Tlascalan, a quarter of an hour since, tore it from me, and fled with it.'

'What art thou?'

'I am Casipeti, the waterman.'

'Hast thou a fair daughter?'

'I have.'

'I have heard young knights discourse of her. This Tlascalan hath mis-

chief in him as well as wickedness, I see. I know not how to help thee. If thou art found within the palace in such guise, thy life is surely the forfeit.'

'I fear not death, if it come in the shape a man should meet it; but I would not die cut to pieces like a dog,' he said, warmly.

'Nor shalt thou. Wilt thou take a slave's dress, and do a slave's duty till I can get thee from the palace?'

'I will, fair maiden.'

'Wait within the shadow of this pillar till I return.'

She immediately left him and went back in the direction in which she had come. After a brief absence, she reappeared, bearing in her hands the dress of one of the domestic slaves of the palace.

'Throw this on over thy waterman's garb and follow me.'

He soon became as effectually and more safely disguised than before, and followed her to the door, through which the emperor and princess had already sometime entered. 'Thou wilt wait within the ante-room,' she said, turning to him, as she went in before him; 'Remember, thou art the princess' attendant. Thy life now depends on thy discretion and address. I would save thee for thy daughter's sake, as well as that I have before done thee a kindness. Those I serve, I ever have a liking for after.'

'With these words they disappeared within the ante-room of the apartments to which the princess had removed. As they did so, the signal flame from the summit of the Temple of Huitziltli reddened the sky, and the sudden light shone into the inner recesses of the palace, while far and wide, stroke after stroke, sounded the tocsin of revolt.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PRINCE AND HIS CAPTIVE.

WHEN the prince disappeared, leaving Fatziza in the voluptuous apartment into which he had conveyed her, he passed through a door so secretly contrived within the wall as to elude the strictest search. It opened into the room which he left to go on his expedition to the net-maker's street. The Tlascalan at the same moment entered from the court of the fountain.

'What news from the otol?' he demanded, quickly.

'I have been listening by the door, but hear nothing. Thou hast a private key, my lord, in thy cabinet, which opens a door behind the arras, where I can not only hear, but see. I came, if thou hadst returned, to ask thee for it.'

'Take it!' he said at once, giving it to him, 'go back, and fly to me with the first intelligence thou dost gain that favors my purpose.'

'Hast thou succeeded in thy other purpose?' asked the Tlascalan, with hesitation, as if aware of his audacity in putting the question.

'It matters not. Yet, I may need thee. The maiden is in my private chamber.'

The Tlascalan smiled with malicious triumph. 'The lover?' he ventured to repeat.

'I left him for thy revenge, slave. Besides, I saw him not.'

'Then he knows not of it. I would I had the happiness to be the first to tell him the sweet tidings. I shall never forget his taking me by the throat, till I have put my knife into his life.'

'Thou art an evil villain, and smell of blood! Go, and bear me the intelligence I wait for, and thou shalt have a hecatomb of victims.'

'I need but one, your highness, like yourself,' he replied, boldly. But I think the steel is trustier than a flower!'

'Foul Tlascalan! If thou wert not so serviceable to me I would have thy head taken from thy shoulders for that speech. Go! Let me not see thee but with tidings of the princess' death.'

The slave left him, and hastened on his mission to the apartments of the princess, where, by the aid of his key, he secreted himself within the arras, and heard and witnessed the whole scene, from the moment the otol was placed on the bosom of the sleeping slave, to the departure of lord Cuiri to arrest the prince.

When the Tlascalan quitted him, the prince prepared to lay aside the armor in which he was cased, when he missed his eagle's feather, and also remembered that he had left his cloak on the balcony, at the net-maker's house.

'There too must I have lost my royal plume!' he said, angrily. 'It will be a mark by which to know that an eagle hath swooped so low as to rob a dove-cote. It matters not. To-morrow I shall have none to answer to but myself, if I choose to cast down the statues of all the gods, and set up my own! But till these cares of empire begin, I will pass the hours in love and ease. Sweet slave! she will shed many tears to sacrifice her love for her beloved serf! I will win her to love me! A thousand maids in Mexico, of high and low degree, would be full willing to take her place. But I will try the experiment, and see if I cannot win her heart. I shall need a bride when I get the empire. She hath grace and dignity enough to adorn a throne, and if she will love me, I do believe, before the gods! I would make her empress. In such a case, I would my cousin should live to witness it. It would be a triumph dear to my heart. But while she lives, even as a prisoner, I cannot hold the throne. The very army of the empire would displace me, she hath such favor with all men!'

Thus ran the current of the ambitious and revengeful Prince Palipan's thoughts, as he laid aside his armor and robed himself in a rich evening court dress, of the most elegant and graceful description. It consisted of an upper coat of brilliant feathers, worn over a light cuirass of gold; half-boots formed of thin plates of gold; brachials of the same metal, and bracelets composed of the most beautiful gems. About his neck was a chain of gold and diamonds; and over his head waved a snow-white plume. But his most costly ornament was a cape of feathers, of the most beautiful description, wrought in mosaic. His whole costume was at once elegant and becoming, such as was usually worn by princes and nobles of the Aztec court in their palaces, when not in full armor.

'This becomes my rank, and I would impress her with it,' he said, as he glanced at himself in the mirrors of *itzli*, which paneled his magnificent chamber. 'I will now seek my pretty net-maker. Methinks she hath been silent; but caged singing birds are ever so till they become familiar with their wires. I hope she will give me no more such melody as her clear throat poured forth when being conveyed to the boat! But it matters not! My apartments are sacred, and no man says to me, what doest thou? I have

something feared my uncle, and stood in awe of my cousin hitherto, but they are now too near their end of power to influence me, and I too near the top of it to care for them. So! my pretty maiden! I will now teach thee how a prince can woo!

Thus speaking, he approached the wall, and stepped upon one of the polished slabs of marble adjoining it, which covered his chamber. The weight of his person upon it seemed to act upon some machinery, for it instantly revolved with him, moving, at the same time, a portion of the mirrored wall, and instantly shut him from his own room into the next. As he disappeared, the plate of *itzli* resumed its former position, and a corresponding piece of marble, from the opposite side, replaced that on which he had been revolved through the wall. The transition was noiseless, instantaneous, and like magic; there remaining behind no sign of the means by which it had been effected.

Fatziza was kneeling with her face buried in her hands in silent despair, where she had cast herself on finding she was a prisoner without hope of escape. She had been at one moment weeping, at another condemning herself for her silence, when she might have alarmed the palace with her cries.

'I feel I have brought the evil upon myself by too much confidence,' she said bitterly, 'and I can only trust to the generosity of the prince, or the interposition of heaven.'

Such were the thoughts upon her heavy mind, when the prince stepped from the slab of marble into the apartment. His low voice near her, was the first intimation she had of his presence.

'Sweetest maiden, I am pained to see thee in tears.'

His voice was very soft and tender; for the prince had that rare excellence of wickedness, — found in its perfection only in those whose native evil of heart has been refined and finished by the accomplishments of high rank and polished intellect, — of appearing most harmless when he was most dangerous, and of covering bad intentions under the most fascinating exterior of sympathy and kindness. He had also the power, common to all bad men of strong minds, of disguising his feelings, and only permitting such to have the ascendancy, at any one time, as that time itself called for. Now, therefore, — although thoughts of murder against the king, of assassination, of usurpation, agitated his bosom; although his soul smarted with the remembrance of discarded love, and a host of dark and conflicting meditations filled his breast, — he subdued, by the pressure of his will upon it, all this troubled sea, and indulged only the feelings of the present moment. To behold now his calm and pleasant countenance, — just enough touched with sensibility to give it tenderness, — no eye could have guessed the thoughts of the busy brain, or believed that in his heart were harbored the dark and guilty purposes, that he had that night taken to his bosom.

He bent over Fatziza as he spoke, and would have touched her hands to remove them from her face. But the sound of his voice acted upon her like a fearful spell. She sprang to her feet wildly, and with a suffocating cry fled to the opposite side of the room.

'Alas, dearest Fatziza!' he said, in a tone of well-feigned sorrow and mortification, 'thou dost fly from me like a deer before the fierce *cajon* of the mountains.'

'My lord prince,' she said, with alarm, but speaking firmly, 'I have as much need to fly. Would to the gods I had, like the deer, the broad plain to fly upon!'

'Nay, sweet maiden. Thou hast no cause to fear,' he said, with gentle reproach. 'If thou art loved by me, thou must blame thy own charms.'

'My lord prince, you love me not. Mock me not, nor demean yourself by speech so unworthy thy rank.'

'Maiden, I neither mock thee, nor degrade my rank. Beauty in woman is rank. Thou art the most beautiful virgin in Mexico. Thou art, therefore, the highest in rank, and my equal. Nay, smile not so scornfully, and curl that sweet lip with contempt, proud beauty. I speak truly, and the sincere thoughts of my soul.'

'Prince, this language is idle. Thou dost forget the princess, e'en were there not a thousand others in Mexico fairer than I.'

'The princess! I did tell thee she had scorned my suit. Besides, though the princess hath beauty, 'tis inanimate, — well enough for an empress, — but 'tis not the soft and spirit-like loveliness, that renders thine own so irresistible.'

'I have heard thee, prince,' she said, with pain; 'I do pray thee permit me to depart to my father's humble roof.'

'Wilt thou go, sweet maiden?' he asked, with real pathos and regret in his pleading tones, for the very firmness of the maiden, from its novelty to him, added, as it was, to her exquisite loveliness, inspired him with a deep and sincere passion. As he spoke, he approached her, and knelt at her feet.

'Dost thou kneel at a serf's daughter's feet,' she said, scornfully. 'Thou dost forget thyself, prince of Aztec.'

'Thou mayest try scorn and withering irony, maiden, but 'twill not move my love,' he said, firmly.

'What will move thy compassion?' she cried, almost hopelessly.

'*Thy love*,' he said, with passionate ardor.

'Prince, I do believe thee generous. I appeal to thy honor. Distress me not. I cannot, may not, listen to you. As one of the royal race I appeal to thee to protect a subject of thy empire. The gods give thee power to shelter and defend, not bruise and break. I am helpless. Save me.' She cast herself at his feet, and bathed them with her tears.

'Noble and spirited maiden,' he said, touched with admiration, and half-relenting from his purpose, 'I do more. I offer thee my love.'

'Speak not of it. I am beneath it. I ask only thy protection. If thou deniest it to me, prince, may heaven take from thee the power it has given thee for the defence of the weak, and give it those who will remember, that to rule is not to oppress.'

'I do not deny it, fair maid,' he said, calmly. 'Rise, and let me speak with thee.'

'I will not lift my face, my lord prince, till thou first promise me thy protection,' she answered, with touching energy.

'From what?'

'From thyself, my prince,' she said, firmly.

'This I promise thee,' he said, smiling. He took her hand as he spoke, and lifted her from the ground, and led her passively to a seat. 'Now listen to me, fairest Fatziza. I have shocked thee by my too rude declaration of passion. Nay, — listen to me. When I beheld thee, seated in thy little balcony by the water-side this afternoon, I did, I do confess to thee, regard thee as only the pretty plaything of an idle hour; but since I have seen something of thy mind and character, my passing admiration, — which went no deeper than my eye, — hath sunk into my heart, and taken the shape and substance of earnest love.'

My prince, it may be true as thou hast spoken ; but thy words only make me more miserable, and give me less room for hope, than as if thy passing glance had not taken deeper root. *That* might have been fixed by some new face a moment after ; but where the heart is touched, then every other maiden, by bringing the first to mind, but makes the impression deeper. My lord prince, I tremble. Your earnest manner confirms your words. If you love me, you will respect me.'

'By my princely honor, sweet eloquence, I do both love and honor thee.'

'Thy honor will save — thy love destroy — its object. Oh, most noble sir ! fling wide my prison gates. Thou wilt be happier for it, and the gods will bless thee. Surely, surely, they will reward evil and injustice.'

'The gods, methinks, have enough to do to look after their own rule, to care much how things go on earth.'

'Dost thou scorn them, prince !' she demanded, with fear and amazement.

'No. But they have given the princes of the earth wisdom sufficient to rule it, and so leave the world confidently to their government.'

'Then thou wilt have to render to them the heavier account of thy governorship. It should besem thee, methinks, to govern wisely and well.'

'Tut, ti ! child, — this is dull prosing for such sweet lips,' he said, tapping her mouth playfully. 'Wilt thou love me ?'

'I can discourse with thee no longer on this painful theme, my lord prince. I have hitherto sought if, perhaps, I might not persuade thee to regard thine own rank and mine — thy power and my helplessness.'

'Then I must despair. If I were a boor, — an ignorant serf, — thou wouldst listen to my suit. 'S death ! If I did not love thee, I could not have patience with thee. I have power, but I supplicate thee. Why art thou content to be so cruel ? I offer thee my heart.'

'Mine I cannot give in return. Thou knowest I love another ; and my heart would be little worth to thee, another possessing its affections.'

'Nay — now thou dost mistake. A serf, like thy betrothed, knoweth nothing of the art of love. Thy heart, Fatziza, is not the half won. He hath not sounded beneath the surface of its deep affections ; but, like a swallow skimming a placid mere, hath but rippled here and there thy bosom. I, like a skillful angler, will draw from its hitherto unmoved depths such a store of love, you have not dreamed was in it. You will wonder, Fatziza, at the richness of the mine, which this Sismarqui hath only walked over. Alas ! 't were a pity such a treasure should be given to one who knoweth not a pebble from a priceless gem.'

Sismarqui hath long loved me, my lord prince,' she answered, with affectionate earnestness.

'It may be, he loveth thee to the bent of his rude nature ; for e'en a hound, to look on, would feel a hound's attachment for thee. Nay — be not displeased — thou knowest I do speak of him as we are accustomed to speak of his degree.'

'I am of the same grade, my lord,' she said, something proudly.

'Thy love and thy beauty ennobled and elevated thee,' he answered, with an animated smile, seeking to draw one from her. 'Thou dost do wrong in thinking thou lovest him. There is a time, about when maidens verge on womanhood, that the heart begins to feel its affections and inherent love, already silently growing from its seed, begins to sprout and put forth tendrils. Tender and vigorous, they readily cling around the support that first offers. At such a time, when thy young heart was luxuriant with the thou-

sand tendrils of love seeking something to entwine around, rather than fall back upon the heart and perish, thine eye fell upon this Sismarqui. You gave him the care of the young vine of thy affections; but he hath little skill, and but one tendril hath he trained to twine about his heart. The rest now run riot over the rich soil. Now, I pray thee, give me the culture of these; and soon, instead of being tied to him by one perishing tendril, thou wilt feel thy heart bound to mine by a thousand strong, entwining fibres.'

'You speak, perhaps, truly, prince. But this one perishing tendril first clung to him, when it was perishing and single, and most needed support. If there are others, they have sprung up since; and, as they were not necessary to unite our hearts together, they will not be necessary to bind them together, now they are already united. Let *them* perish, my lord prince, and all the sap of my heart's affections flow upwards to his, through the single stem, that, directed by nature, clasped itself around him.'

'This is all very pretty in the way of sentiment, perhaps,' answered the prince, with a smile. 'He can never appreciate your beauty, child. What careth a mind like his if your forehead be high and almost regal, as it is, as if thy blood were kingly! What careth he whether thy cheek be like the brilliant hue of the carnate lily, or a dusky brown! What heedeth he the faultless symmetry of thy neck and shoulders; the perfect outline of thy figure! Hath he ever taken this beauteous hand in his, and admired the just proportion with which the fingers taper to the nail; or hath praised the shape and transparency of the blushing nail? Hath he clasped thy rounded arm, with wonder at its beauty; or marvelled at the sweet perfection of thy foot? Hath he worshipped the embodiment of divinity in thy whole person, and, like a devout worshipper before his shrine, bent the knee in homage to thy beauty.'

He knelt before her as he ended, and looked the impassioned devotee he had mentioned. The maiden was not unmoved by all this. She was of a warm and susceptible nature, with a heart full of tenderness and love, and a fountain of ardent feelings, ready to pour themselves out into a bosom that she felt was kindred with her own. Love had led her to choose Sismarqui's, and instinct now prompted her to shun the prince's. If he had been truly of a noble and generous nature, had his love been pure and honorable, had he been really worthy of her as a man, instinct would never have proved false, and warned where there was no danger. In such a case the young armorer would have had a powerful rival in the prince, even in sharing the deepest affections of the maiden; for she was not unmoved by his subtle flattery, not untouched by his deep and devoted passion. She looked up, and fixed her eyes upon his face, as if his words had awakened momentary reflection! Had the prince been other than himself—had he been the generous Lord Cuiri, or the brave young Lord Esquitl, there would have been, at least there *might* have been, (there is no guessing exactly what a woman always will do,) some fear that Sismarqui's poor perishing tendril, allowed him by the prince, would soon have perished indeed. There was something, however, in the prince's face that she shrunk from, and the tendril of her virgin love clasped, as if for protection, closer the stay it had clung to in her lover's heart.

'Noble prince,' she said, her heart more strongly fortified than ever; 'I have listened to thee, and feel grateful for the interest you have taken in a poor maiden like me. I feel that I am in your power; but I am sure if you truly love me, you will not make me its victim. I cannot love you.'

'You speak more kindly than thou hast yet done. If I permit you to go free, will you give me hopes that I may gain an interest in your heart? Wilt thou permit me to woo on the same terms with this Sismarqui?' he asked, with a confident smile, taking her hand, and looking up into her face, his eyes sparkling with animation and hope.

'Nay, your highness, think of me no more,' she said, with painful earnestness. 'Remember the princess, to whom thou art betrothed, my lord prince!'

'Have I not told thee,' he said, with a slight flush of anger, that the princess will henceforward be nothing to me?'

'It is a lover's quarrel, my noble prince! It will be healed when thou dost next meet her.'

'Never, Fatziza! I do hate the princess as deeply as I love thee.'

'And dost thou hope I will believe that thou dost wish to solace thyself for the loss of a princess' love, with that of a net-maker's daughter? No, no, my lord prince! Such love as thou bearest towards me is not incompatible, in thy estimation and the world's, with that thou shouldst entertain for her,' she said, with spirit.

'The gods are my witnesses!' he cried, 'that you do me wrong! Hark ye, sweet Fatziza, if by any chance blight should come upon this love of Sismarqui for thee, or death should remove him, leaving thy heart free when its grief hath passed, wouldst thou not then give it to me?'

'No, my lord prince! I will never consent to dishonor!'

'Ha, I see it all! It is not, then, so much thy affection for him who is betrothed to thee — so much thy indifference to me, that keeps thy hard-sought love in reserve, but doubt of my honor. Doubt it not, sweet Fatziza.'

'I can but doubt it, your highness,' she answered, with firmness; 'or else believe thou dost wish to make me thy wedded bride. This, thou knowest, cannot be with thee and me!'

'Dost think so, pretty one,' he said, with a singularly mysterious smile, that troubled her; '*wilt* thou be my bride?'

'My lord prince, I am pained and weary with this discourse. If you have pity in your bosom, let me go free, as I was brought hither.'

'In one minute. Harken to me, child! I have a secret to convey to thee; for I love thee passionately, and must try my last argument; for while there is hope that love or ambition may move thy obdurate heart, I will use no other means.' He then added, solemnly and impressively, 'if thou wilt be mine, Fatziza, and now consent to bestow thy affections upon me, I will make thee my princess!'

'Thou dost laugh at me, my lord prince, presuming upon my credulity; and after take advantage of my trust in thy promise, to put me to shame among the maidens of the land!'

'Hear me,' he said, approaching her ear, and speaking in a low, deep tone, that startled her with its emphasis; 'the Princess Eylla hath offended me this night beyond forgiveness—'

'Well, my lord prince?' she said, seeing that he paused.

In his manner and eye, more than from his words, she painfully believed that she read, at the instant, evil to the princess, and fearing from his silence that he would hesitate to reveal what he at first contemplated doing, she resolved, with that firmness and decision of character she had more than once shown the possession of, to seem to come over to his views; and, by giving encouragement to his hopes, induce him, without reserve, to make

her a confidant of all his intentions, in reference both to the princess and to herself.

'The princess, my cousin, hath offended me,' he repeated, more impressively; 'and,' he added, with a blazing glance, 'an Aztec never forgives an injury!'

Fatziza involuntarily shrank before his look, but her self-possession was not shaken, nor did her purpose falter.

'The princess is something quick with those that she likes not. Is it not so, my lord prince?'

'She hath the subtilty of the serpent, beneath the mask of a dove!'

'I like not duplicity, my lord, much less in a princess.'

'The princess hath it to perfection. I have made an escape that I espoused her not.'

'There is, indeed, much room for gratitude the espousals do not take place.'

'Ha! dost talk thus?' he exclaimed, with pleased surprise.

'Is it truth, my lord prince, that the princess will never become thy wife?' she asked, with seeming interest.

'She never will,' he answered decidedly.

She looked on the ground, deliberatively and thoughtfully, when he had answered, as if the seeds of ambition, which he had been dropping into her heart, had taken root, and were growing. This idea crossed his mind, and he furtively and delightedly watched the expression of her features.

'Well, child, what art thou thinking of?' he asked, at length, with impatience and curiosity.

'Will the princess, then, be sole empress?'

'There seems deeper meaning beneath thy words than appears to the ear, maiden.'

'I was wondering,' she said, with finished address, 'if it would be policy for you to permit the princess to reign with her dislike to you. Knowing you to be an enemy to her, she will be tempted to use her power to thy inconvenience.'

'The gods have spoken by thee!' he cried, grasping her hand with warmth. 'Thou art indeed a wise and well-judging woman, and would become a throne! Thou lovest not the princess well, I see, Fatziza. Ne'er one beautiful woman loved another.'

'Wilt thou remain in the empire, my lord prince, when the princess takes the throne?'

'Wherefore this interest in me?'

'I have weighed thy words to me. It were, indeed, better to wed a prince than a serf. But—'

'Thou art coming to thy senses! But *what*?'

'It were better to wed an emperor than a prince,' she added, boldly, anticipating her suspicions of his own purposes by her words.

'Thou hast it,' he cried, with animation. 'I see I shall find in thee a worthy coadjutor to my schemes.'

'Hast thou thought as I have hinted, my lord prince?' she asked, with real earnestness, relieved to find her suspicions confirmed, and that her artfulness had not been used in vain.

'I will tell thee, Fatziza, what I have thought,' he answered with stern emotion. 'Listen! for I feel I am addressing a bold and kindred spirit, who feels with me, and whose interests are linked with mine own.'

'I would have you think so, my lord prince.'

'I did but need a woman of thy strength of mind, and who has shown her preference for ambition to love, to secure what I have in view. The princess' days are numbered. I have this night sent her a poisoned flower, and do but wait to hear if it hath taken effect. The moment she is dead, I assassinate the emperor in his bed, call my guards about me, and proclaim myself sole monarch.'

Fatziza trembled at this fearful development of the plans of the wicked prince, and her heart bled with sympathy for the princess, whom she felt she had no power to rescue. Yet she listened, with outward composure, and by her command over her countenance, deceived the prince as to the nature of the effect his words had produced upon her. He looked to her, as if he expected her to reply.

'This is a sanguinary plan, my lord prince,' she said, with an energy of tone that came from the deepest feelings of horror, but which he referred to kindling ambition; 'but its conception is worthy of yourself.'

'Its success is certain. But I have not told thee all. There is among thy class a spirit of disaffection and hostility to the government, which must ere long break out. I have, while you have been within this chamber, conceived a plan,—since thou hast shown thy strength of character, and thought better of thy foolish love for a serf,—which will unite both the nobles and the people, and heal the spirit of insurrection which now menaces the stability of the throne.'

'Name it, my lord prince.'

'Canst thou not guess it?' he said, taking her hand, and speaking in a subdued and passionate tone.

She hung her head in silence upon her bosom. How little did he know the feelings that swelled her heart. It was with the deepest emotion of disgust and fear, that she could reply, in her assumed character, with which her sick heart had long since wearied,

'I cannot guess, your highness.'

'Hear, then. It is to make you my empress.'

'My gracious prince.'

'Nay — be not moved. 'Tis policy, as well as love, that dictates it; as 'tis ambition towards this very thing that has changed thee. Thou seest I have read thy heart, the while. What thinkest thou of this? Is it not well conceived? I shall, by elevating one of themselves to the throne, please the mass of the people, and ever hold them as a foil to the jealousy and hostility of the nobles.'

He rose and rapidly paced the chamber, as if impelled to motion by the irresistible impetuosity of his mind.

'Tis ably conceived, my noble prince; and promises, if the first steps be securely taken, to be most successful,' she answered, also rising, from the impulse of her feelings.

'Thou dost pledge thyself to me in this matter?' he demanded, with animation, returning, and placing his hand firmly upon her wrist.

'I pray your highness, give me some little space to collect my thoughts,' she answered, with hesitation, and alarmed at his energy.

'No. Thou art a woman of native coolness of character, and hast composedly spoken thy ambitious hopes, as if they had been deeply weighed in thy mind and in thy heart. No. The promise must now be given, Fatziza. I must seize the throne, and I must win the good-will of the Mexitian race,

to maintain myself securely upon it, against the opposition of the faction of the princess. This I can gain only through yourself. No moment's delay can be given — none should be needed, methinks, — where the price is an imperial crown.'

It is the vastness of the end that makes me timid at the outset, my lord prince. Give me some hours' time to consider it,' she said, with alarm too perceptible in her manner to escape him. He fixed his gaze steadily upon her, not with suspicion, but with surprise and angry impatience.

'What means this? Hast thou not promised me thy love? Didst thou not, thyself, ere I had breathed it to thee, suggest this very scheme? Dost thou retract?' he demanded, menacingly, doubts of her consistency suddenly arising in his mind. 'Thou shalt not leave this apartment, I solemnly swear to thee, maiden, till thou hast knelt with me beside yonder brazen altar of the sun, and pledged thy life and thy honor, thy heart and thy hand, to this thing.'

'Then the pitiful gods have mercy on me!' she exclaimed, lifting her hands to the heavens. For an instant, she seemed to be absorbed in silent prayer. Then, with a kindling eye, blazing with the spirit of a lofty purpose, she looked him steadily in his face, and said, in a firm and indignant tone,

'Prince! I devoutly thank the gods that I am not the wicked thing you would believe. I have deceived thee. The sentiments I uttered, the hints and suggestions I gave words to, were not my own, but as it were the fingers, with which I felt thy heart's pulsations, first suspecting the disease. I did but put a shaded lantern before me to light my way, myself in shadow, down into the dark recesses of thy guilty soul. No, prince. I am no assassin, — no enemy of the Princess Eylla, — no friend of the wicked and usurping Prince Palipan! Dishonor or death, I am conscious, is before me. I choose the latter; and, therefore, do thus fearlessly confess my duplicity, to make thy fury and resentment o'ermaster thy passion.'

The prince stood looking upon her, while she was speaking, with amazement only equalled by his fierce mortification. He could with difficulty believe he heard aright. But she was there before him, spirited, resolute, and defying. His first impulse would have been to strike her to the heart. This she had hoped her words would have prompted him to do. He was fully aware of this feeling; and, with the greatest efforts, restrained himself, by a deeper vengeance he meditated. He was silent, and, for a few moments, walked the chamber, as if to collect his mind. At length, he stopped opposite to her. Her cheek was like alabaster, for its deadly paleness. Yet she met his look with firmness.

'Proud virgin, thou hast sealed thine own death. But not by my hand. Fear not thou dishonor. I have no passion mingled with the potion I would give thee. Death, — such a death as thy soul would shrink at, did I name it, — is in store for thee.'

She had nearly fallen to the floor, overcome not so much by his terrible words, as by the calm, vindictive manner, in which he addressed her. She apprehended, she knew not what. She wished for instant and sudden death. She sank upon a seat near, and was silent, from the keenest disappointment and fearful forebodings.

'Fatziza,' he at length said, in a changed tone of voice, 'I will forgive, and let thee depart.'

She shook her head in despair.

'I will now leave thee here, foolish victim of thy own folly,' he continued,

with bitter reproach, 'and promise thee, that within the half hour, I will send some one, who will liberate thee.'

She was silent. She felt the prince would never forgive, and that some dark, deceitful motive was hidden beneath the sudden change in his manner.

'Thou dost not believe me,' he said, with a sinister smile. 'Very well. Thou shalt soon learn if I speak truth or not. Fare thee well! I shall see thee no more alone. When I next behold thee, it will be in the presence of thousands, whose eyes, like mine, will be equally fixed upon thee.'

CHAPTER VIII.

THE VICTIM.

WITH these ambiguous words, which, notwithstanding his promise to liberate her, rung with threatening, he was about to quit the chamber as he had entered it, when the Tlascalcan bounded into the apartment from the secret opening. His face indicated the greatest alarm. In his hands he carried the robe and cap of the maschal, he had snatched from Casipeti as he flew past him.

'Your highness, fly!' he cried, eagerly.

'What hath happened?'

'The princess suspected the otol, and tried it upon one of her slaves. It soon killed her, and confirmed her suspicions. She hath ordered Lord Cuiri instantly to arrest you and myself, and hath but now despatched a messenger for the emperor. A moment later, and you are lost. Fly. I have a disguise that will protect you for the present, till you can better insure your safety.'

'Where are my guards! Why did you not fly to them, and bring them around me? Thou hast lost the empire to me. Ho, there! I will defend myself, — and let the die be cast at once!'

'Your highness, I had but time to hasten hither. There is no escape to join your guards. By this time, Cuiri, with a party, are without your door.'

'I will face them! They dare not arrest a prince of the blood.'

'The lord Cuiri will show little favor, where the princess hath commanded him to act. Your highness, there is no alternative but instant flight. I pray you, put on this disguise, and leave the palace by the terrace, the route you came with the maiden.'

The prince reflected a moment. In one instant, he felt all his plans had been subverted. But his was not a spirit to despair. He felt the madness of placing himself in the emperor's or the princess' hands, at such a moment. He had yet hopes of accomplishing his end, through the instrumentality of the very causes that threatened their defeat.

'No. I will not fly. I will remain here. This retreat is secure.'

'Tis suspected by the princess, and others. Thou wilt be sought for here, if the walls have to be taken down. Fly, prince!'

'Whither?'

'To the Temple of the Sun.'

'Ha! thou sayest well. Tlascalan.'

Without further delay, the Tlascalan placed the cap he held in his hand upon the head of the prince, casting, at the same time, his snowy plume to the ground, and threw over his person the ample embroidered robe of the *mascal*.

'I will quit the palace; but I fly not from lord Cuiri, but to reach by another route than I intended to do, my uncle's throne,' said the prince calmly. 'But what shall be done with this haughty beauty? 'T will just fulfil my purpose in view! She shall be borne thither also; canst thou carry her?'

'She will impede thy flight. We fly for our lives, your highness.'

'Thou for life, and I for a throne, rather,' he said, sternly. 'Tlascalan, thou shalt bear her to the temple! If I let her remain here, my vengeance is lost to me forever. Take her up in thy arms, and muffle her voice. If I lose my throne and life, I will not lose my revenge on this woman.'

During this scene, Fatziza had sat a surprised and startled listener. The intelligence of the escape of the princess filled her heart with joy; the command for the arrest of the prince inspired her with hope. She listened eagerly to detect signs of the approach of the nobleman despatched to arrest them; but as their language began to relate to herself in person, she became once more alarmed with the most painful apprehensions that at last the way of escape and rescue that seemed to be opening for her might be lost. When she heard their decision to bear her to the sanctuary with themselves, she mentally resolved to die rather than be borne away from her hopes of succor. The Tlascalan approached her, to cast over her head the cape of feathers he had torn from the shoulders of the prince. She bounded away from him with a piercing shriek. The prince instantly placed his hand upon her mouth, while the Tlascalan drew the cape over her face, and took her up in his arms. At this instant, the sound of voices was heard within, and the wall was struck with heavy blows on the other side, shivering the mirrors of *itzli* that paneled it.

'That shriek hath brought them upon us,' said the prince. 'To the Temple! Within twenty-four hours I will make it my palace.'

With these words, he left the chamber by the private door by which Fatziza had been borne into it, and, followed by the Tlascalan, with her in his arms, he hastily traversed the galleries and courts to the terrace. As he gained this, he saw the light kindled by Hucha, and heard the ringing of the shield of war mingling with the shouts of the insurgents.

'It is as I anticipated,' said he, 'the people are in arms. By the sacred Huitziltli! I am in mind to place myself at their head, and so take the throne!'

'My prince,' said the Tlascalan, 'seek your own safety first. Every avenue of the palace will be soon guarded to the water-side, and escape will be impossible. Once in the Temple, you can act.'

'You speak truly. I would have thy burden safely deposited there. It was my intention soon to have sent a priest for her, had not this ill news come, not expecting to be driven thither myself. Hark! the shouts. I hear strokes of steel. They are engaged in contest!'

The prince soon gained the lemon-grove, and thence reached the water-side. Here, instead of taking a boat, he followed the quay some distance, leaving the palace behind him, until he came under the second *marb'e* bridge. Here he ascended a flight of broad stairs, and came into the moon-lit square of the Temple of the Sun, in which he had witnessed the evening sacrifice,

and also held discourse with Casipeti. They took the north side of the magnificent square, keeping within the shadows of a colonnade, composed of tall, beautiful shafts of the purest marble, that adorned that side of the square. On the west side towered the glorious Temple of the Sun, a gorgeous pile of marble, and gold, and silver, and precious stones. Emerging from the colonnade, they came before it, and passed beneath the altar on which stood the statue of the deity, elevated before its lofty portal. This divine image was of vast size, of black and shining marble, and dressed richly in feathers and gems. A radiating crown, like the sun half-risen, was upon his brows, and from his ears and under lip hung stones that shone like stars. His breast was covered with massy gold, and on it was painted ascending smoke, to represent the prayers of the distressed. A large emerald, shaped like a human heart, was suspended from his neck by a chain of gold, and bracelets of the most beautiful description were upon his arms. In his left hand he held a golden fan, set round with beautiful feathers, and polished like a mirror, in which he was supposed to see every thing that happened in the world. Upon the wrist of his right arm was perched a silver eagle. He was seated upon a white cloud, wonderfully sculptured to resemble the truth, from snowy marble. At his feet was the lesser altar of brass, upon which, once a year, the fairest virgin in the empire was sacrificed to him.

The prince turned to his attendant, on coming within the shadow of this deity, and said in a quick, stern tone,

‘Place thy burden on the steps of this altar, and remove the cape. The god hath heard maidens shriek, and will again. ’T is music he well loves!’

The Tlascalan obeyed him, and Fatziza, though nearly insensible from suffocation, recognized at a glance the place to which she had been brought. She looked at the altar of human sacrifice and shuddered. The prince, who was attentively regarding her, smiled.

‘Proud maiden,’ he said, coldly, ‘thou hadst best look closely upon it, to familiarize thy vision with it.’

‘What mean you? whither do you convey me, prince?’ she cried, with agony.

‘Thou shalt know in time. Wilt thou walk, or shall the Tlascalan again carry thee?’

‘Nay — if I must go forward, I will walk,’ she said, shrinking from the slave.

‘Lead her, then, and follow me,’ he commanded, going towards a small portal of the temple to the left.

It had no door, for the temple was never closed, night or day. Passing rapidly along a low arched avenue of brazen pillars, on one side of the vast area of the temple, he came to a circular hall that seemed to be lined with plates of silver. The representation of the sun, in dazzling *itzli*, blazed in the light of a sacred flame on an altar beneath, like the sun itself. The floor was of mosaic, exquisitely laid, and beautiful hieroglyphical paintings adorned the polished surfaces of each stone. Various articles of sacred furniture, all of solid gold, were dispersed about the apartment, and upon the steps of the altar. Opposite the altar was a table of gold and a bed. Standing by the altar, watching the flame, which burned in a censor of gold upon it, was a venerable priest, in crimson robes, with a tiara of silver, adorned with pearls, upon his head. As the prince came to the entrance of this oratory of the temple, the veil of which was drawn aside, he paused with reverence, and waved his slave to remain behind where he was. He then cast aside

his disguise, entered the place, and silently knelt an instant before the sacred flame. He then rose to his feet.

'Reverend priest, I seek this sanctuary of the deity for protection,' he said in a voice of command rather than of prayer.

'Thou hast it, prince,' calmly answered the priest, without betraying surprise or curiosity.

'I would see the high-priest,' he said, in a voice which had little reverence for the sanctity of the place, or the sacredness of the person whom he addressed.

'He is in his chamber, within,' answered the priest, directing his glance towards a door beneath a canopy on the left.

Without hesitation, the prince advanced towards it, opened it, and entered. On a couch, in a room hung with arras of silver cloth, and richly and beautifully decorated with the sacred feathers which had been offered to the deity by worshippers, reclined a stern old man of great majesty of aspect.

'Thy blessing!' said the prince, kneeling beside his couch.

'The gods bless thee, my son, and render thee the instrument of blessings to the people. 'Tis long since thou hast visited the Temple of the Sun. This devotion at this hour speaks well for the preservation of the purity of our religion when thou shalt wield the sceptre.'

'It is my reverence for the gods, and my regard for their honor, holy father, that hath brought me here now. On the seventh day hence is the great day of annual sacrifice. Hast thou a victim?'

'A maiden exceedingly fair hath been sent for from some village beyond the walls.'

'Hath she been brought hither?'

'Once—but hath escaped. Alas! that such have not piety greater than love of life; they think more of the short happiness they hope by living to enjoy here, than of the glorious felicity they shall be rewarded with in the abodes of the gods!'

'Thou sayest truly, holy sir. I have found a maiden who is the most lovely in the empire—a fit offering to the deity.'

'The gods reward your piety, my son. If thou wilt send her to the temple, she shall at once be delivered over to the sacred virgins of the altar, instead of the virgin I spoke of, for the sacrifice.'

'My piety, holy father, would not let me delay. She is already without the oratory.'

'Hath she piety, or doth she consecrate herself like most other virgins, with reluctance, to the deity?'

'She will need thy authority and coercion,' replied the prince.

'It shall be cared for,' answered the High Priest, striking a silver bell near him.

It was instantly answered by a youth, in the white habit of one of the servitors of the temple.

'Send to me four of the younger virgins of the altar,' said the priest; and then turning to the prince, he said, 'conduct her hither, noble prince, and with thy own hands place her in my charge as the representation of the god.'

The prince left the private chamber of the High Priest, and, on re-entering the oratory, to his surprise beheld Fatziza, at the same instant, break from the Tlascalan, and cast herself at the feet of the priest who was watching the altar, and implore his protection. From the moment the

prince left her, she had been devising some safe means of flight. From the side cloister in which she was standing, she could survey the vast interior of the dimly-lighted temple, and its gloomy grandeur and vastness of space filled her soul with awe. Here and there, above its pavement, altars of black marble rose, crowned with statues, like spectres in the dim light, while in far-distant niches, priests, in crimson vestments, could be seen watching the lamp of sacred flame that burned before its peculiar shrine. She would have fled in that direction, but the distance, gloom, and silent mystery of the immense space terrified her. She looked back, but she felt if she even gained the outside of the temple, she could not fly beyond pursuit. She beheld the venerable priest before her, and thought she saw benevolence stamped upon his features. She hesitated; then, as if impelled by some irresistible impulse, darted away from the Tlascalan, and threw herself at his feet, just as the prince had ended his interview with the High Priest.

'Save me, I implore thee, by the sacred deity, whose minister thou art!' she cried.

'Thou shalt have sanctuary, maiden,' he said, kindly, believing that, like others, and like the prince but now, she had sought the temple for refuge from the consequences of crime she had committed; it being the custom, not only for the people to seek it on such occasions, but for the priests to grant it; and such sanctuary, once granted, could not be violated, even by the emperor.

'The gods! she hath taken sanctuary,' cried the prince, with vexation. He instantly returned, and informed the high priest. 'What shall be done?' he demanded.

'She was, at the moment she sought it,' answered the high priest, 'a victim devoted to the altar, and was, therefore, beyond the reach of the altar's protection.'

'T is true,' exclaimed the prince, joyfully. 'Thou hast accepted her, and she was but to be delivered to thee when she sought it. But,' he said, as if struck with a happy thought, 'this may be turned to a favorable issue. Send for her hither, as if to ensure her safety, and then deliver her over to the virgins of the sun. She may not know she is other than a refugee till the morning of sacrifice. Thus thou wilt have a quiet victim.'

'T is best, perhaps, some little deception like this were practised,' said the high priest.

While he was speaking, four youthful maidens, arrayed in white robes, entered the chamber, holding between them a rich heavy veil of transparent silver cloth, each having a corner laid across her right arm. None of them were beautiful, but all had sprightly, cheerful faces, and light, airy figures.

'Virgins of the sun, heaven hath sent the annual victim to the temple. Go forth and meet her!'

They immediately commenced a hymn to the deity, in a sweet, wild strain, and slowly entered the oratory. Fatziza lifted her head, and, with pleased surprise, beheld them, while her ears were entranced with the music of their choral voices. They came around her with slow and graceful motions, and, as she knelt bewildered, cast over her the silver veil, chanting,

Hail, sacred sister — bride of heaven!
 Hail, holy virgin of the sun!
 To thee our god's high faith is given —
 By thee the bridal crown is won!

Bride of the sun, the sacred sun —
 The ties of earthly love are riven;
 The time is near, the altar waits,
 To give thy spirit back to heaven.

Hail, holy virgin of the sun!
 The earth from thee shall pass away;
 And when a few more sands have run,
 Thou 'lt soar above, in bride's array.
 And there, the bridegroom, god of heaven,
 Robed in the everlasting fire,
 Will wait to clasp within his arms,
 Thy spirit from the sacred pyre!

Chanting these words, in a singularly sweet and touching manner, they gently raised her, wholly passive, from the ground, scarcely conscious of her situation, and only feeling a calm sense of relief from the presence of the prince, and in the companionship of her own sex. She knew not enough of the rites of the temple to be aware how fatal was such companionship! Instead of fear or doubt, she felt that she was in a sanctuary, and under the protection of the sanctity of the place; if, as she rose to obey the maidens, she reflected at all upon their object, it was to assure herself that they were conducting her to a place of security.

They led her between them, still chanting a soft and soothing air, forth from the oratory; but, instead of reëntering the chamber of the high priest, they turned aside into a door to the left, and slowly disappeared. The prince, who had witnessed all this, listened to their low, sweet hymn, dying away in the distance, until it was lost in silence, then took leave of the high priest, passed hastily through the oratory, and resuming his disguise, joined the Tlascalan.

'Now,' said he to him, 'that I have accomplished this, I shall avail myself of my disguise, and return to the palace. I must act! Follow me!'

On reaching the extremity of the gallery, instead of leaving the temple, he turned aside into a recess, in which burned a lamp, by the side of which there lay a pile of torches. One of these he bade the Tlascalan light, and then placing a key in a door, he entered, and disappeared in a dark passage, that seemed to descend beneath the foundations of the temple.

CHAPTER IX.

SISMARQUI AND THE PRINCE.

WHEN Sismarqui had crossed the court of the silver serpent, he found he had taken a direction, after passing by the fountain, that was conducting him to the entrance of a dark gallery, instead of to the doors of the prince's apartments, as they were described to him by Casipeti, who was, as it has been seen, detained behind by the young lords in the rotunda. Looking back after him, and not seeing him, he was too impatient to wait for him, and was turning to the right, trusting to good fortune to guide him, when some one laid his hand familiarly upon his shoulder.

'Ah, cousin Palipan! thou art late abroad in full armor. Whither art

thou going, that thou takest the gallery to the emperor's stables! I would I were a knight, and then I would have an ass to ride.'

'I pray thee, good fool,' said Sismarqui, familiar with the person and costume of Sulukis, 'detain me not.'

'I have a rare sport to tell thee, cousin,' said the jester, clinging to his cloak, and walking beside him, notwithstanding Sismarqui's endeavors to get rid of him; 'the maschal o' the palace, having an over-stock o' wit and flesh, ha' begotten another body to put them in, as like his own as two peas — save that the new one hath something more freshness o' wit.'

'Nay, fool, detain me not.'

'Whither goest thou?'

'To the prince's — that is, to my own apartments. If thou wouldst talk with me, guide me thither.'

'Dost thou need a guide, cousin. An' it were late i' the afternoon, I should ha' suspected good wine had shortened thy memory. Dost thou see that door with a statue of Virtue on one side, and a statue of Vice on the other?'

'Yes.'

'Well, those statues are the emblems o' the government.'

'They are not the prince's rooms.'

'No, they lead to the emperor's throne-room. He ever walketh in and out between them, and so he walks i' the government.'

'Trifle not with me. Go forward to the door of the prince's room. Methinks it is one of yonder entrances.'

'Dost thou see three marble steps, leading to a door o'er shadowed by a silver eagle?'

'Such is not the description of it,' said Sismarqui to himself, who had been too much occupied with thoughts of Fatziza to pay proper attention to the waterman's instructions. 'I see it, good fool,' he answered, hastily.

'It is the entrance to the apartments of the empress. I wept three whole hours when she died, and wore so melancholy a look for a month afterwards, that the emperor banished me his presence, saying I kept him in too fresh remembrance of his dead wife.'

'Fool, release my cloak, or I will leave on thy pate painful remembrance of the hardness of my iron gauntlet,' answered Sismarqui, angrily.

'Nay, then; if thou art so drunk, prince, as not to know thine own door, how should thou expect me to know it who have not wit enow to give a mouse an idea. But I will have pity on thee, and tell thee. But when, be-imes, I would crave favor o' thee, thou must bear in mind my charity.'

'I will do it, good fool.'

'First answer me one thing. Am I not a drunken prince, and art thou not a fool?'

'I see it not.'

'Because thou hast let wine steal thy brains out. I will prove it thee. Art thou not a prince?'

'Well.'

'Art thou not drunk?'

'Be it so.'

'Then thou art a drunken prince?'

'Have it any way that thy humor likes, so thou lead me to my door,' answered Sismarqui, impatient, yet feeling it necessary, if he would gain his end, to indulge his wayward humor in some degree.

'Well, being a drunken prince, thou hast parted with thy wits, seeing thou knowest not the way to thy own chambers, when they are within twenty feet o' thy nose. Having lost thy wits, thou art become a fool. Dost acknowledge?'

'It cannot be disputed,' said Sismarqui, smiling, but vexed at the delay.

'Nay, cousin. Be not in too much haste,' he said, detaining him to the spot. Having proved thee to be a fool, I will in one word prove myself to be a prince.'

'Speedily.'

'I never did a thing speedily in my life, cousin Palipan. Speed hindereth the growth and consistency o' fat; the wind o' speed finds its way into the pores, and makes it light and spongy. Besides —'

'Nay —'

'Thou being a prince, — and a drunken prince, — art like me, as I have proven by my logic, for having parted with thy wits. If a prince be a fool, then a fool is a prince, and I being a fool, am a prince. So we are brothers.'

'And what is the end of this? Wilt thou not guide me, as I command?'

'The end o' it is this, cousin, — that I and thou are equal yoke-fellows. Thou hast no right to command me to show thee the way, and I am under no obligation to obey thee. Give me thine arm, brother prince, and let us go square together. But I guide not a foot, — not I. Thy ignorance o' the way and my knowledge o' it will be like two street walls on each side to keep us in it; and so, by the favor o' the gods, if we go forward we may stumble upon thy door.'

With these words, the fool took Sismarqui's arm, and leading him, notwithstanding his declaration to the contrary, a few paces to the left, passed with him round an angle of the court, which had concealed from him the door he sought.

'Dost thou know that portal, cousin?' asked his guide, pointing to it.

Sismarqui instantly recognized the description Casipeti had given him; and, casting off the fool from his arm, instantly approached it, and without hesitation threw open the leaves, entered, and disappeared within it, with his hand resolutely grasping the hilt of his sword.

'There is discourtesy and ingratitude most blank,' soliloquized the fool, looking after him. 'No, I am not a prince, for I have too much breeding, if this be the quality o' it. Methinks,' he said, after an instant's reflection, 'I have suspicions o' this prince. He were not drunk, for he staggered not; yet he knew not his own door. If he be the prince, he hath not only taken to folly of late, but hath got a deeper voice and less courtesy than his wont. There be two mascals i' the palace; why may there not be two princes? I'll keep my eye on the door, and see what comes o' it. Ah! there is the mascal, yonder, or his other self! I will go gossip with him on this matter.'

As he was about to cross the court, he saw the Tlascalan pass Casipeti, disrobe him, and the next instant fly past him, and disappear in the chambers of the prince. Ere he could recover from his surprise at witnessing this, and the transformation of the mascal, he beheld the monarch and princess cross to the apartments of the empress, and also the scene, though too distant to hear any thing, that passed between Casipeti and the Peruvian maiden. After seeing him assume the disguise she brought to him, and afterwards follow him into the ante-room of the empress' chambers, his amaze

ment knew no bounds. He rubbed his hands with glee, and capered with boyish delight.

‘Here is matter! here is treason! here is mischief! The Tlascalan hath a hand in it,—the prince hath a hand in it,—the Peruvian hath a hand in it,—and Sulukis shall ha’ a hand in it. And there goes the Lord Cuirí, and he has a hand in it.’

Thus speaking, the fool glided along in the shadow of the colonnade, that surrounded the court, stole towards the door of the ante-room, into which Casipeti had entered, and slowly opening it, disappeared within.

Sismarqui, on entering and passing through the outer room of the prince’s chambers, found himself in an apartment that for an instant dazzled him with its light, and the richness of its decorations. Drawing his sword, he glanced around for the prince,—for some sign of the presence of Fatziza. He beheld, on a table, the cap without the royal plume, which the prince had worn on his expedition to the net-maker’s street, and on the floor he beheld the dress and armor he had laid aside, and which answered the description which Hopo and Harani had given him of the costume of the cavalier. He was turning away from them, when his eye rested on a flower, which had been caught in a link of the corslet. With a beating heart, he bent down and removed it. It was one of a wreath which he had himself presented to Fatziza in the morning, and with which he knew she had adorned her hair that evening. His heart bled,—his spirit burned. But he needed not these evidences and tokens to assure him who had robbed him of his betrothed bride. They served, however, to assure him that she was here. He placed the flower to his lips, and on his heart, breathing the deepest retribution.

A brief search convinced him that the apartment was empty. He discovered a door opposite to the secret passage leading to the hidden apartments of the prince, and threw it open. It admitted him into a sort of private chapel, dedicated to the sun, whose image of gold was seated upon a pedestal of marble at the extremity. He surveyed the place strictly, and then advancing to the altar, knelt on one knee, and solemnly renewed his vows of vengeance and retribution; for all hope of saving Fatziza in honor had taken flight. Rising to his feet, he passed through an arched door behind the altar, and came into a beautiful gallery, lighted alone by the moonlight streaming through casements of rose-colored *itzli*. It was adorned with numerous statues to deities, and seemed an avenue of pedestals and altars. He knew that he was in the temple of the lesser gods, contained within the palace, and which the emperor himself had dedicated. On one hand, he beheld the god of mirth, on the other the god of wine. Here was the god of the imagination, there the tutelary deity of friendship. Every attribute of the deity was also here deified, and every virtue had its statue and its altar. A soft, rich light was diffused throughout the place, and silence held her reign there. Neither priest nor sacred flame was visible. Here was no worship ever performed, no oblation offered. Their presence was supposed to insure wisdom, virtue, and power, to the head of the empire, and endue him with all the attributes, of which they were the sacred emblems. Impressed with awe and with solemn feelings, he moved with reverence along this stately avenue of statues, in search of some outlet that might conduct him to the prince’s more private chambers. While engaged in the search, the Tlascalan, with the masca’s robe, passed through the apartments he had quitted, and ignorant of his presence, disappeared through the secret door

into the room, where he had found both the prince and Fatziza. In the meanwhile, the Lord Cuirri and the elder Lord Oznenetl, having ascended the steps of the Lions to the Court of the Fountain, crossed towards the very gallery, at the entrance of which Sismarqui had encountered the jester, and slowly traversed it to its extremity, where it branched off to the right. Here they lingered awhile in silence, the young noble pacing the pavement, thoughtful and impatient, until the quick, measured tread of men-at-arms caught his expecting ear, from a distant part of the dim passage. In a few moments, the young cavalier Tlanotl joined him, with six men-at-arms.

'Thou hast too many,' said Lord Cuirri, quickly. 'We need to be secret in this arrest.'

'They are all tried men, and will be needed, my lord, to guard the doors.'

'Very well. Follow me.'

'Who is to be arrested?' asked the elder cavalier, as he walked along by the side of the Lord Cuirri.

'The prince.'

'The prince! Is it treason?'

'Murder and treason both, my lord,' he said, sternly.

'What hath he done?' asked the noble, with amazement.

'Attempted the princess' life, by poison.'

'Then did I never prophecy evil of this man for naught. 'T is a bold step to arrest him, my lord.'

'T is by the princess' commands. Silence, now, my Lord Oznenetl. We are in the court. Tlanotl, I leave to you the disposition of the men-at-arms.'

'I will place two within and two without the door, lest he should attempt to escape on seeing us, for his guilty conscience will give him suspicion of our purpose. He is certainly within, for I saw him pass to his chambers not three minutes before the terrified messenger from the princess came for you.'

'You will enter close after myself and Lord Oznenetl, with the two remaining men-at-arms, and wait in the ante-room till you are required to act. I would show the prince courtesy for his blood, but he hath little claim to it.'

With these words they advanced to the elegant portal of porphyry, and the young nobleman instantly threw open the ivory folds of the door, and entered. The Lord Tlanotl disposed of the men-at-arms on either side, and advancing near the entrance to the inner apartment, took his position. Lord Cuirri and the old cavalier entered it together.

'He is not here, at least,' said the latter, looking round, with disappointment.

'There are secret chambers within his apartments, I am told,' said the young nobleman, 'and these panels of *itzli* must conceal the secret entrance to them. He cannot have learned our intentions, and fled!'

'Here are apartments beyond,' said Lord Oznenetl, approaching the door Sismarqui had left open.

'That leads towards the gallery of statues, and thence to the throne-room,' answered the young nobleman, 'by which there is a subterranean passage to the Temple of the Sun, known only to the members of the imperial family and to the high priest. If he hath flown, he hath taken that way. I will first well examine this wall. Ha! here is a fragment of a silk robe shut in between these two nicely fitting edges of *itzli*, as if some one, in passing hastily through, had caught and rent it. This is the secret way!'

He violently struck, with the head of his sword, the frame of the panel, which the Tlascalan's haste had indeed betrayed, shattering the transparent materials of which it was composed, and, with the point, attempted in vain to force it open. Sismarqui had heard the noise of their entrance in the apartment, and instantly turning back from the throne-room, into which he was entering, suddenly made his appearance before them. His sword was drawn in his hand, and his whole bearing was hostile. He looked the prince in the life.

'The prince!' exclaimed the old cavalier, advancing upon him. Sismarqui stood silent on seeing the two nobles, and, full in view, in the next apartment, the men-at-arms, instead of him whom he expected to find there.

'I arrest you, sir,' said the Lord Cuiri, going up to him, 'as a prisoner of state!'

Sismarqui started with surprise and alarm! He believed himself to be arrested on his own account, as leader of the revolt. His first impulse, remembering the amnesty promised by the princess, was quietly to surrender his sword. His next thought was of Fatziza, and his yet unavenged honor, and he resolved to defend himself, and, if it were possible, to effect his escape. He therefore retreated a step, and placed himself in the door through which he had entered, in a defensive attitude.

'Nay, prince,' said the young nobleman, resolutely, 'we do not intend to do battle with you. Your intention has failed. I arrest you by the princess' commands.'

'I know it, my lord; yet the princess hath pledged herself to give me pardon with the others.'

'Pardon! traitor.'

'I do confess myself having been a traitor, but I had trusted to the word of the princess.'

'Your highness, this is trifling! Give me your sword!'

'My lord, this is not the prince's voice,' said the old Lord Oznenetl, aside to the young nobleman.

'The bars of his vizor disguise it; yet it doth sound something strange.'

'He doth not take fire at our intrusion, as the prince would!'

'Will it please your highness to lift your vizor!'

'I perceive you take me for one I am not,' answered Sismarqui, seeing, from the present aspect of things, that the prince's character was no better protection than his own proper one; 'I am not the prince, but come hither to seek him!' As he spoke he lifted his vizor, and showed them the face of a stranger.

'Who art thou?' demanded the young nobleman, with the deepest feelings of disappointment and anger, 'that has assumed the bearing and costume of the prince?'

'I am Sismarqui, an armorer. The prince hath borne off my betrothed bride, and I assumed this guise, which he left behind him, to gain admittance into the palace to rescue her.'

He had scarcely replied, when he heard the alarm of revolt, and saw the bright light of the signal Montezuma had decided upon, flashing up the sky.

'What means this?' cried the nobleman, springing to the casement. 'See, the altar on the Temple of War is lighted! Hark—the brazen Tlalonzon!'

'It is revolt!' cried the young cavalier Tlanotl. 'I heard something rumored of disaffection, and couriers have been passing hourly between the palace and garrisons, so that the emperor hath had intimation of it.'

'It is revolt, my lord,' said one of the men-at-arms. 'A man from the city, in the disguise of the *mascal*, came to the battlements and tampered with us. One or two of us have listened to him, to learn his plans, that we might make them known to the emperor; but afterwards he came and said it would not take place. One of the insurgent leaders was called by him Sismarqui. He said he was an armor embosser.'

'Ha! then the gods have placed him in our hands! This accounts for his presence here. Seize and cut him down if he resist. The prince must have headed these revolters!'

Sismarqui had been hardly less surprised at the sound of the insurrection than they. He stood listening with surprise. The words of the men-at-arms, and the mention of his own name, drew his attention. The command of Lord Cuirí, and his suggestion as to the movements of the prince, suddenly aroused his love for life and his desire of vengeance, and he instantly turned, and darted away through the hall of statues.

'Pursue him!' cried the young nobleman to Lord Tlonotl and the two men-at-arms. 'He cannot escape far. I will remain, and search for the prince, if he be not the mover and head of yonder revolt. Hear their shouts! There goes the battle-cry of the imperial guard! There is, indeed, fighting between the men-at-arms and the people! The emperor hath prepared for it.'

'If it were a fair battle between armies,' said the old cavalier, listening to the noise and roar of the distant conflict, 'I would not rest till I were mingling in it. But 't is but butchery there!'

'Bring hither yonder marble statue of the god of Loyalty, which his highness can now dispense with, and break in this panel,' said the young nobleman to the two men-at-arms in the ante-room; 'the god will freely give his image to aid in the discovery of a traitor.'

Sismarqui reached the throne-room on flying from his pursuers, and, ignorant of the outlets of the place, stood for an instant at a loss what course to take. All was darkness and silence around him. Suddenly he saw a door open beneath the throne, and two persons make their appearance. One of them he instantly recognised as the Tlascalán, who bore a torch in his hands; the face of the other he did not see, but, from his dress, he thought it to be Casipeti, by whom he had been deserted on his way to the prince's apartments. He bounded towards them, as his pursuers entered behind him.

'Hold, Casipeti! let us escape by this door!' he cried, seizing him by the arm. 'Fatziza is lost forever, and I believe the prince to be with the insurgents, for he hath turned traitor to the throne.'

The prince — for it was he himself, who, trusting that pursuit would be over, and confiding in his disguise, had returned by the subterranean passage to the palace, for the purpose of placing himself secretly at the head of his guards — was not a little surprised at the words of the speaker, as well as amazed at the perfect semblance of himself he presented to his eye. Ere he could speak or reply, the men-at-arms came up, and attacked Sismarqui. The prince instantly recognised the young cavalier Tlonotl, and divining his object in being in that part of the palace with soldiers, struck the torch out of the hand of the Tlascalán, but not before the young noble had discovered, by its light, who he was. He bounded forward to arrest him, with the cry, 'It is the prince!'

'Who?' cried Sismarqui, the while defending himself stoutly.

'He in the *mascal's* robe,' answered the young noble.

The Tlascalan threw himself between his master and Lord Tlanotl, and struggled with him, while the prince fled, pursued by Sismarqui, who escaped from the attack of the men-at-arms, with a cry of vengeance.

'Ha, men-at-arms! If the prince is to be caught, that fierce youth will arrest him,' cried Lord Tlanotl. 'Seize this lynx, that hath twice nearly put his knife into my side. 'Tis the Tlascalan!'

One of the soldiers went to his aid, and, after a violent conflict, made the slave prisoner; while the other, a moment after, followed by the young noble, pursued the prince.

Lord Cuiri heard the noise of pursuit from the gallery of the statues, and the next instant the prince, divested of his cap and robe, bare-headed and flushed, bounded into the chamber, with Sismarqui close behind him. His glance fell on Lord Cuiri, and he instantly saw his perilous situation. He was armed only with a light sword, and all the defensive armor he wore was a silver cuirass he had put on before his interview with Fatziza. Lord Cuiri and the old noble instantly presented their swords at his breast, while Sismarqui, seeing that he would be arrested, withheld his revenge, and stood by. The prince, finding escape impossible, at once assumed a characteristic position. Drawing himself up with princely haughtiness, he glanced round sternly upon them, and said in a tone of well-feigned indignation and surprise —

'How now, lords! what means this! I am the prince!'

'This confession, your highness, explains our meaning without further words,' answered the young nobleman, sternly. 'I arrest you as a traitor!'

'Ha! this to me?' he cried, with a flashing eye and a burning cheek. 'Leave my chambers, nobles!'

'Only with your person in custody, my lord prince,' said the young man, decidedly.

'What hath been urged against me?'

'I neither charge with crime, nor pass judgment, your highness. I but obey the princess, who hath given me orders to arrest you.'

'My pretty cousin!' he said contemptuously; 'I acknowledge no authority but the emperor's. If he command, I obey.'

'I command thee, then, traitor!' cried the stern voice of the emperor, who entered the apartment at that moment by the passage through the throne room, 'to surrender thy sword and person to the Lord Cuiri.'

'The prince in silence gave up his sword to the young nobleman, and then folding his arms on his breast, turned towards the monarch, with a countenance expressive of the deepest sense of injury and consciousness of innocence.

'Your majesty,' he said, with a degree of humility that formed no part of his true character; 'I am falsely accused. The guilt you lay to my charge, I am innocent of.'

'My lord Cuiri, you will conduct this traitor to the dungeon, called the Axuzco dungeon, once occupied by a traitor less guilty than he.'

'Hear me, your majesty,' he cried, casting himself on his knees before the unyielding monarch.

'The princess, not I, is to be your judge, prince,' he said, sternly.

'Then have I little hope, save to fall a victim to a proud woman's jealous humor.'

'Fear not! the gods shall weigh the justice she administers!' answered the emperor. 'Lead him away! But place no chains upon him.'

'Once more, my gracious uncle, I implore thy indulgence — I appeal to thy sense of honor. I am of thy blood — an Aztec prince — thy nephew!'

'Therefore the more darkly guilty in thy crime,' replied the emperor, with indignant sternness. 'Lead him away!'

'Never!' he cried, with fierce exultation.

'He bounded forward, and lighted upon the marble slab. It instantly revolved with him, and shut him from their sight; but Sismarqui, who had been forgotten in the deeper interest felt for the prince, and who was just in the act of questioning him about Fatziza, reached the spot at the same instant, and caught the panel with his sword, ere it returned to its position. He forced it back, stepped upon it, and was also irresistibly carried into the room after him. The prince was in the act of flying through the door on the opposite side, when the armorer caught him, violently drew him back, and cast him to the floor. He then placed his foot upon his breast, and the point of his sword to his throat.

'Who art thou that pursuest me in my own shape?' cried the prince, with fear and horror.

'Thy evil destiny.'

'What wouldst thou, man or demon?'

'Vengeance.'

'Have I wronged thee?'

'To unforgiveness. Confess where thou hast secreted the maiden thou hast made the victim of thy princely lust, and then die!'

'Art thou Sismarqui?'

'Does thy conscience bid thee ask it? I am.'

'The maiden Fatziza hath not suffered wrong,' answered the prince, with that irresistible sincerity of tone that the young man's heart was filled with joy. He removed his foot from his chest, but still held his sword to his throat.

'I believe thou sayest truly, prince,' he answered.

'I swear it, by the gods! She hath received no wrong at my hands, save bearing her hither.'

'Where now is she, prince?' he demanded, resolutely.

'Let me rise, serf, and I will tell thee.'

The sword was removed, and the prince got to his feet. His face expressed fear, rage and mortification. He looked distressed, and his whole appearance served to excite sympathy and commiseration, rather than resentment.

'Well, your highness,' demanded Sismarqui, as these thoughts passed through his mind.

'Aid me in making my escape, and I will tell thee.'

'My head would then answer for thine. Dost thou hear! they are taking down the wall!'

'There is a way of escape for us both by this door, and so round a terrace beneath the battlements to the water. Follow me!'

'Hold, Prince Palipan,' said the young armorer, standing between him and the door, 'you have wronged me in abducting the maiden, although she may have been preserved from dishonor. I feel little desire to have thee escape.'

'Then thou wilt never know where the virgin is thou searchest after,' he answered, with determined malice. The wall shook at this instant as if giving way, and the prince struggled for the door. The monarch's voice was heard encouraging those who were at work.

'If thou wilt tell me so that I can surely recover her, I will let thee escape.'

'Didst thou see from whence I appeared to you in the throne room?'

'Through a door beneath the throne?'

'It was. Enter that, and follow the passage to its termination, and thou wilt find her.'

'Wilt thou swear it?'

'By the sacred gods! I left her there not twenty minutes since. Release me, villain!'

'In whose custody?'

'Art thou not satisfied? Know then, in the custody of the priests of the Temple of the Sun,' he answered, with savage triumph, seeing a part of the wall at that instant fall in, and knowing now escape impossible.

'A victim?' demanded Sismarqui, with horror.

'She hath already been consecrated, and is beyond human reach,' he replied, maliciously.

'Then perish, accursed monster! Those who seek thee shall find only thy torn corse.'

With these words, Sismarqui seized the prince by the breast, and with iron strength dashed him upon the ground. At the same instant the whole panel fell in, and Lord Cuiri leaped into the room through the breach.

'Hold! slay him not!' he cried, catching the arm of the infuriated young armorer.

'My Lord Cuiri, step not between me and my revenge,' cried Sismarqui, fiercely, thrusting aside the young nobleman; and, placing his foot upon the almost senseless prince, he would have thrust his sword into his body. His hand was arrested by the elder cavalier, and the sword at the same instant was struck from his hand by the Lord Tlanotl.

'Seize and hold him, men-at-arms,' cried the young nobleman, as Sismarqui struggled to reach his victim. 'He hath nearly slain the prince.'

'It were a blessing from the gods an' he had done it ere we got in,' said the monarch. 'It would have saved both poor Eylla and myself much trouble and pain.'

'Rise, my lord prince,' said Cuiri. 'Are you much hurt?'

The prince slowly got to his feet, pale and suffering. He made no reply, but with a lowering brow folded his arms upon his chest, and seemed to await his fate. The young nobleman looked at the emperor, as if for direction.

'Let him be held prisoner in his room, since he hath suffered this,' said the emperor. 'My Lord Cuiri, I shall look to you for his safety.'

'My head shall answer it, your majesty. I pray your majesty,' he asked, as the emperor was leaving the apartment, after having cast a glance of stern pity upon his unhappy nephew; 'what disposition shall be made with this prisoner, who hath been the instrument of placing the prince in our hands?'

The emperor, who, from the first, had no thoughts or eyes, save for his nephew, and who had supposed Sismarqui, if he had previously noticed him at all, in the other chamber, to be one of the party of the Lord Cuiri, now fixed his eyes steadily upon him, as he stood between the two men-at-arms, a prisoner.

'By the eagle of Aztec! this is a fairer semblance of our royal nephew than the sorry wretch who stands there. How is this, sir knight, or what-

ever thou art? The royal feather! and the prince's cloak! What is this? Speak!

'Your majesty,' said Sismarqui, endeavoring to compose his feelings, to address his sovereign; 'I am the son of Ota, the armorer and embosser of shields. I am betrothed to a fair maiden of my own degree, whom the prince, thy nephew, inspired by passion, did insult in broad day, as she was seated in her father's balcony. I resented it, and unhorsed him.'

'Ha!'

'He was masked, your majesty,' answered Sismarqui, boldly; 'and I did suppose him one of the court knights.'

'And being a prince, the offence were greater, and more worthy of punishment. Thou didst well, though thou dost deserve to lose thy head for unhorsing a knight, even in intention, for so slight a matter as some passing salutation. Proceed with thy tale. What did he?'

'Attacked me with his sword, which I broke!'

'Better still,' said the emperor, ironically, 'I wonder not, my lords, insurrection is abroad to-night, if such be the mettle of the serfs. It chimes with that of a certain Montezuma, who resisted my governor of guards, and caused the slaughter of some score of slaves and several soldiers.'

'It was this act of the prince, and the brow-beating of thy governor, that, with other things similar, gave head to the revolt that now rages in the city,' said Sismarqui, with a boldness, that, in a man in less perilous circumstances, would have been madness; but he felt that nothing could add to his heart's bitterness for Fatziza's loss, (for there was no mortal rescue of a virgin dedicated to the deity,) and he was well convinced that he had no clemency to expect from the emperor.

'This is ringing speech. What is thy name?'

'Sismarqui.'

'Hast thou seen the Lord Esquitl this night?'

'I have, your majesty.'

'He hath consented to join the revolvers; is it not so?' asked the monarch, with a very slight smile.

'He has, your majesty, — since 't is known to you.'

'And promised to place the arsenal in your hands?'

'He did, your majesty.'

The Lord Cuirri and the other nobles, and even the prince himself, started at this intelligence, so new and incredible to them.

'The Lord Esquitl a traitor!' repeated the nobles, looking one at the other.

'Let this matter of the revolt pass for the present,' said the emperor. 'Lord Esquitl will give us good account of it ere long. What further of the prince, and what is thy business here in such guise?'

'Hearing, an hour ago, that some cavalier had rudely borne away from her home the maiden to whom I am betrothed, your majesty, I hastened to her chamber, and did indeed find it vacant; but on the floor lay this eagle's plume, and on the railing of the balcony hung this royal cloak of green feathers. These told me plainly who had been the despoiler. I was then cased in mail, as one of the leaders of the revolt. I placed the plume where it now is, cast the cloak over my shoulders, and sought the palace to rescue her or avenge myself on the prince. Aided by my disguise, I gained admittance hither, and was in search of the prince in his rooms, when these nobles entered to arrest him. Now, your majesty, I neither cast myself on

your mercy, nor excuse my rebellion, though the princess Eylla, ere the revolt broke out, hearing of it, sent and granted amnesty to all who would retire to their homes without taking up arms. This I had done when I learned my dishonor.'

'The Princess Eylla knew of this!' exclaimed the monarch.

'And sending for Montezuma, our chief, pledged to him her imperial word, that all should be forgiven, and such changes granted as the people desired, if they would keep submissive.'

'This is strange! 'Tis wonderful, she kept it from me. The serf, Montezuma, have an interview with her!' thought the monarch to himself. 'She knew it in its outset! I will question her of this by-and-by. Thou didst not find the maiden, bold slave?'

'Your majesty saw me pursue and enter this room behind the prince. I seized him by the throat, here, and bade him tell me where he had concealed her he had dishonored.'

'What said he, surely?'

'That she was still an honorable maiden; but that if I would permit him to escape from thee, he would tell me,' answered Sismarqui, sternly, fixing his menacing glance on the silent prince. 'I let him rise to his feet, and finding it too late to escape, and that he could deceive me no longer, he out with the fiendish caption of his vengeance against me and her.'

'He slew her not?'

'No. Would to the gods he had. He conveyed her to the Temple, and dedicated her to the Sun.'

'Ha! didst thou do this thing, prince?' demanded the emperor, with stern surprise.

The prince remained silent and gloomy, and neither stirred nor lifted his eye-lids.

'You have done worthy of death, slave, in this rebellion; but I leave you to the princess, who, it would seem, hath taken the matter up,' said the monarch, turning to Sismarqui, and speaking without anger. 'But you have suffered wrong at the hands of the prince, and I pity your sorrow. If I had the will, I could not rescue the maiden my excellent nephew has so revengefully sacrificed. Had she fallen a victim to his passion, I should have regarded it lightly; but this is a refinement of revenge I was ignorant of. Thou art a prisoner till the Princess Eylla's pleasure be known. Lord Tlanotl will take thee to the prison. Prince, thou art a state's prisoner, and for the present, this room will be thy place of confinement.'

'Here is the Tlascalan, your majesty,' said Lord Cuiri, pointing through the breach to where this confidential slave of the prince was guarded, between two men-at arms.

'He shall be hung without mercy, — not that I know he hath been guilty of any present villainy, — but for his progressive crimes.'

'He was party to the attempted assassination of the princess, your majesty.'

'Then cast him into a dungeon till this matter be thoroughly examined into. If my gracious nephew hath crack of escape, he shall have all leaning of mercy to enable him to get out at it.'

With these words, the monarch left the apartment, and returned through the throne-room to his own private chambers, from which he had been drawn by the noise of the attempt to arrest Sismarqui and the prince. When he entered them, he saw, standing by the casement that looked towards the

scene of revolt,—his prime minister, and one or two others of his councillors.’

‘How goes this war of Esquilt?’ he demanded.

‘The fire on the altar hath burned quite out, your majesty, and the sounds of conflict have nearly ceased.’

‘There is now and then a good blow dealt, by the sharp ringing of it,’ said his majesty, glancing forth, and listening.

‘It seems to have been a final one, for all is still,’ said one of the councillors.

‘The young Lord Esquilt hath shown himself a general, said the emperor, warmly. ‘He better deserves the throne,’ he added, to himself, ‘than this recreant prince. And ’tis the heaven’s truth, this girl must not rule alone. There must be found some husband to her taste, if he wield not the sceptre conjointly with her. The race of Aztec princes must not end in me.’

He moved across the chamber as he gave shape to these thoughts, and continued to pace it, in deep meditation upon the subject that had taken possession of his mind. At length, he suddenly left the room for the chambers now occupied by his daughter, and which communicated with his own.

CHAPTER X.

THE PRINCESS AND HER LORDS

THE Princess Eylla, after being left alone in the chamber to which the emperor had conducted her, sat looking forth from the lattice, with her mind agitated by the events that had transpired. Grief and indignation filled her bosom. Though gentle by nature, and endowed with every lovely quality and heavenly virtue that render her sex the superior, she had firmness of mind, and a quick, proud spirit, that resented and condemned guilt. Her sense of justice overcame her charity for the prince’s disappointed love; and, although she pitied him for his fallen hopes, she severely condemned him for his criminal retribution. After dwelling some time upon this unpleasant subject, she abruptly cast it from her thoughts, as if she would recur to it no more.

‘He hath dyed his soul in blood. He is guilty, and must abide his fate. Yet his life shall not be on my hands. In years of distant exile he shall repent his crime, if so be the gods will give him the grace of penitence. I will think no more of him. My thoughts would dwell upon a more pleasing theme. From vice in ermine they would contemplate virtue in the coarse tunic of the serf!’ she said, with a heightened glow upon her cheek. ‘And is it true, my heart? Are thy affections placed thus lowly? Irresistible love! how sudden is thy work! how wonderful thy power!’ She was silent and meditative a while, and then added. — ‘Methinks I should blush to confess this love for one so humble. Yet I do not. My heart bounds with glad pride when it thinks of him. I have confessed to him my love, and shame made not my voice to falter. No, my heart was in my lips, and how freely did my love surrender it to him! And he is worthy. Oh, how noble his nature made him. How my love would keep all virtues upon him. T- it

he seems every thing a man,—a prince should be. Nay,—let me think no more of princes. Methinks, from the bent my heart hath taken, that the gods are about to reverse the scale of degrees, and begin again at the line of virtue from which, as men climb up higher on it, they wander away, till, as in my princely cousin, no trace remains of it. If my hand go where my heart hath been given, this noble youth will rekindle the spark of honor that centuries of vice and luxury have extinguished. Ha! what light is on the summit of yonder temple! 'Tis the altar of Huitziltli in flame. Hark! the tocsin of war. Those deep, deep, measured tones of alarm sound like the knell of the empire. It is the beginning of the revolt, that Montezuma hath not been able to stay. May heaven protect him, whatever else befall!' she cried, with the deepest fervency of feeling. She gazed forth with a wild and startled look. The whole city, with its temples, towers, groves, columnar altars, and palaces, arching bridges and encircling walls, was illumined with the bright, red light, while loud and sullen came the heavy tones of the Tlalanxou, each stroke sinking to her heart. The shouts of the revolvers filled the air, and soon afterwards she heard the battle cry of the legions, and the shrieks, clangor, thunder, and turbulent roar of men mingling in fight. Her soul sickened. Her head fell upon her arm, and for several moments she was without motion. At length, she lifted her head.

'My poor father! The people will prevail! I care not for the throne. My heart hath taken a lowly mate, and will be content with a lowly destiny. Yet,' she continued, with animation, 'I would fain place him whom my soul has chosen upon a throne! My heart would honor him to its full love. Those fearful cries! Shall I go to the emperor to give the alarm! Nay, he knows it as well as I, and will too soon send his legions to mingle in the slaughter. Alas, I shall feel that there is but *one life* there! And that all men are aiming at it! The gods protect him! Did they not love me enough to obey my wishes—to confide in my promises, or loved they blood better? Oh, that I could get some intelligence of his safety!'

At this instant Tzitzis entered from the ante-room, where she had left Casipeti disguised as one of the princess' attendants.

'My noble princess!' she cried, as she entered, the people are in revolt.'

'I know it, Tzitzis. Fly and bring me some intelligence.'

'I know nothing. The guards at the palace gates are all doubled, and every side I turned, (for when I heard the alarm, I ran forth to the rotunda) I beheld only bodies of men-at-arms, standing stock and stiff, like statues, with spears in their hands. All the galleries seem to be alive with soldiers, waiting for some order. Indeed, my noble princess, I would not venture forth for my life. Poor Felitza's terrible death hath terrified me.'

'Then sit thou here. I will call some one else to send.'

'Nay, my princess; I will go. But see, from the lattice—the flame hath subsided, and the shield is no longer struck. The shouts are stilled.'

'There is indeed a cessation of the dreadful conflict,' replied the princess, going to the window. 'Alas! what life must have been poured out in waves of blood! I fear—I fear! Oh that I were a dove, that I might fly and relieve my anxious heart! His absence and his danger but each moment deepens my love—binds him closer to my affections!'

'What dost thou fear, my princess?'

'For him! If thou lovest me, maiden, bring me present intelligence of his fate.'

'The prince!'

'Yes, *the prince!* But not the prince thou dost mean!' she said with lofty and enthusiastic feeling.

'Who? I will fly to obey thee.'

'Methinks thou art dull, girl.'

The Peruvian was not dull. She had, in the interest of subsequent events let the handsome young bondman she had conducted forth by the private postern after his interview with the princess, pass from her thoughts. The princess' manner awakened her memory. The events of the early part of the evening flashed upon her mind. Suspicion then, of her mistress' tender regard for him, was all that she ventured to cherish in her thoughts. She was now confirmed in them.

'I will bring you word so soon as a messenger can be sent and return,' she said, with a bright smile.

'Thou knowest, then, whom I mean, gypsy;' said the princess, with a blush. 'Know thou, maiden,' she added, in an impressive voice, and with a maidenly dignity that became her at such a disclosure, 'that if the gods will, I intend to elevate to the throne this Montezuma, as I have already elevated him to my heart.'

'He is most noble and most worthy, gracious princess,' answered the Peruvian; 'but I fear the emperor.'

'This attempt of the prince upon my life will work in my favor. My father will think no more of him, and leave me to my own choice.'

'Perhaps he might, should you choose my Lord Cuiri, who is related to you by blood, but he will never give his consent for you to espouse a serf.'

'Call him not a serf—yet he is a serf. But I will make him an emperor.'

'Thou knowest the fearful curse, noble princess, that hangs over the heir of thy house that weds against the will of the imperial parent, or the revealed will of the gods!' said Tzitzis with awe.

'There thou hast it,' said the princess, quickly. 'Thou hast well said, or by the revealed will of the gods! This, be sure of, maiden,' she said, with reverence and fear, 'that I shall never incur the curse heaven hath suspended above my head. 'Tis too fearful to contemplate or speak of. But I shall wed this Montezuma, mark you, by the will of the gods.'

'I trust thou wilt, my noble mistress,' said the Peruvian with doubt; 'but I fear his majesty! I would I could believe it as thou seemest to do!'

'Thou shalt! Know that there is a prophecy, that, like the eagle that led our fathers hither, hath followed our race downward without lighting, that saith, when a female shall inherit the sceptre of the Aztec monarchs, a slave shall sit upon the throne. My faith is firm in this prophecy!'

'And this slave is —

'Montezuma.'

'T is wonderful.'

'And 't will prove no less true! Now go and bring me good tidings.'

Tzitzis, whose mind reflected ever the clouds or sunshine of her mistress', and was only happy in her own happiness, left the chamber with a light heart and cheerful hopes. Wonder and surprise were not passive in her breast; but, leaving the indulgence of them to another time, she went lightly on her mission. After crossing a beautiful hall adorned with sculpture and paintings, formerly appropriated to the attendance of the ladies of the late empress' court, when in waiting upon her majesty, the Peruvian entered the small ante-room or portal where she had left Casipeti. To her surprise

she found he had a companion with him. She was about to despatch the waterman to the city, when it occurred to her that, as a friend to Montezuma, he might serve his interest, should he need such an auxiliary, better in the palace than abroad. She therefore said, in passing him,

'Remain thou here, slave! If the princess call thee, serve her faithfully. What dost thou here, foolish Sulukis? Why art thou not asleep?'

'Asleep!' cried the fool, with astonishment in his visage, 'Marry come up! and who can sleep this night in all the palace, or in all Mexico, for that matter? Here comes first a pair o' quarrelling mascals, as much alike as thy two ears, and what should I do but see the sport o't! Then comes a running here and a running there — a courtier this a-way, and a silly woman that a-way! and what should I do but be kept busy looking no mischief went on without my knowing of it! Then comes transformations o' the strangest sort, wi' the emperor and cousin Eylla in the midst o' it! — all o' which pertaineth to treason! Then comes the banging o' the god's shield, and lights enow in the sky to put one's sight out! Sleep, quotha!'

Tzitzis did not wait to hear him out, but left the portal to seek a messenger to despatch for some tidings of Montezuma. The fool looked towards the door for a brief instant after she had left, and then, shaking his head gravely, turned to Casipeti, who was seated on the step of a niche, in which burned a portal lamp.

'Why ha' she not been asleep? Why art thou not asleep?'

'I wait on the princess,' answered Casipeti.

'Doth she go fishing to-night?'

'How mean you?' demanded the waterman, with surprise, and suspicion of being known.

'What is thy name?' asked the fool, abruptly, without replying to the interrogation.

'It is — is — is — it *is*!' stuttered Casipeti.

'Thou hast a villainous name, cousin Iziziziz. Where wert thou born?'

'Born?'

'Who had the begetting o' thee, that he gave thee such a heathenish handle for honest men's tongues to take hold o' thee by?'

'In Mexico.'

'And yonder Peruvian maiden, who hath not half thy years, was the midwife,' said the wily and mischievous jester.

'Thou art in humor, good fool!'

'Thy mother was a maschal o' the palace, and thou didst come into the world a waterman i' full feather, save thou wert not armed with a pair of oars; and this Tzitzis wrapped thee in a slave's cast off garment, to keep thee from catching cold.'

'Thou knowest me, fool!' exclaimed Casipeti, with alarm, taking him by the shoulder.

'Should I not know thee, when I saw thee put together out of three pieces!'

Help me to escape from the palace, and I will give thee a golden *xu*.'

That will buy me a silver whistle wi' a gilt chain. No, no! The Emperor 'll give me five *xu* to have thee well hanged.'

'Thou shalt have five *xu* then, so thou give me guidance safely forth.'

'Hast thou got them, demanded the cautious fool.

'Here in my girdle.'

'Let me see thy purse, gossip! I ha' lived too long wi' courtiers, to trust

what a man's tongue saith. Out wi' thy purse and let me see five golden *xu* in it !'

'Wilt thou let me walk forth beside thee, and wilt tell the guards the princess hath despatched me on a message, so that they will let me pass. Thou canst so engage them with thy folly, if thou wilt, they shall not heed me !'

'Why wouldst go, gossip ?'

'I hear there is fighting in the city, and would see it.'

'I would rather keep safely here. Give me seven *xu*, gossip, and it shall be done.'

'I have not seven *xu*.'

'Then thou art hanged.'

'Who is hanged ? What sayest thou ?' cried the Peruvian maiden, returning. 'I will have thee punished for intruding hither.'

'I ha' but been nursing thy bantling here, till thou didst come back. I ha' a sympathy for him since I was at his birth, and was just thinking I would like to be in at his death.'

'He hath discovered me, maiden, having seen me adopt this disguise,' said Casipeti, with earnestness.

'Thou wilt hang him, wilt thou, fool !' cried she, threateningly, yet, without anger. 'Thou shalt ne'er come to the servant's banquet-hall again to feast. So, away with thee with thy hanging, sir cut-throat braggart.'

'I will not hang him, pretty Tzitzis,' he said, coaxingly tapping her on the cheek.

'Then see thou keep secret that thou knowest him to be other than he seems. When thy interests are involved, thou hast full sense enough.'

'T is not sense, 't is discretion, Tzitzis.'

'Call it what thou wilt. See, then, thou be discreet,' she said, passing towards the chamber of her mistress.

'Thou wilt give me the five *xu*, cousin.'

'For what ?'

'For my discretion.'

'If thou wilt try to aid my escape.'

'It is done for thee, gossip.'

With these words he held forth his hand, and Casipeti placed three *xu* in it.

'I will give thee the remainder at the gates.'

'T will smell o' bribery i' the noses o' the sentinels, cousin, and I shall be hanged as well as thou.'

Casipeti added the remaining two pieces of gold, and then wrapping himself carefully in his disguise, followed him from the ante-room into the colonnade of the court of the fountain.

'Whom hast thou sent ? What hast thou heard ?' demanded the princess, as Tzitzis reentered her chamber.

'Elic.'

'He is a good messenger.'

'He is a jealous one.'

'Thou forgettest this youth's destiny ?' said the princess, reprovingly.

'But Elic knoweth it not, and went with reluctance. He accused me of desiring to see him.'

'He will soon be undeceived, Tzitzis,' said the princess, smiling ; 'so do not be pained.'

'Have they taken the prince yet ?'

The prince ! I had forgotten I had sent to arrest him. The nobler

prince hath filled all my thoughts! Go and learn what hath become of Lord Cuirri! Bring me word if the prince hath been taken! Leave me; there is my father's step!

As the slave departed, the emperor entered her chamber, after announcing his presence by a light tap on the door. She met him with a tender embrace.

'My dear father!'

'I seem to receive thee from the dead, my child, after thy escape.'

'What of my — of the —'

'The treacherous prince hath been taken, after having once escaped. The gods seem, indeed, to send madness upon those they intend to destroy. He had got out of the palace, then threw himself back into the jaws of danger again.'

'Where is he?'

'He was something bruised in the struggle with those who arrested him, and I made his rooms his prison. The Lord Cuirri hath him in custody. The Tlascalan is also taken. Alas, my poor, misguided nephew! I did hope he would one day sit on my throne!'

'How appeared he? How met he the arrest?'

'At first, boldly — then, imploringly — then, with cowardice — and, finally, with sullen submission.'

'My poor cousin! Now that resentment hath had its victim, I do feel pity for him. What will be his fate, sir?'

'Death,' answered the emperor, sternly.

'Nay, do not shed his blood!'

'It shall not be shed. He has courage to die if he be of the Aztec race!'

The princess shuddered, for she knew the bloodless but fearful death doomed princes must die.

'Wilt thou hold a judgment for him on the morrow. He may plead his innocence; for, 't is true, I have no testimony from whom the fatal otol came, save my faithful Peruvian slave's. But 't is evidence enough for me. I need no further.'

'He hath confessed.'

'Confessed it!'

'I visited him but now, on my way hither! I found him silent and gloomy, pacing his room. I asked him if he desired a trial. He replied — "No, emperor; I confess myself guilty, not only of conspiring the death of the princess, but of contemplating thine, had I succeeded, and then ascending the throne."'

'Heaven be thanked for thy escape, dear father!' she cried, with emotion. 'Alas! my wicked, ambitious, deeply guilty cousin!'

'He further confessed that his object was to unite the throne with the people, by a union with a Mexitlian maiden, and thus fortify himself against the opposition of the nobles to his usurpation, by his favor with these.'

'Said he so!' cried the princess, with a kindling cheek, all the woman awakened in her. 'Who was this maiden, sire?'

'The daughter of a net-maker, by the name of Fatziza! She has a brother, Montezuma, who was the cause of the tumult in the afternoon, and for whom thou didst plead so warmly. Why does thy hand tremble thus in mine!'

'T is nothing, sir.'

'The prince had conveyed to the palace, and confined her in his room: for

this purpose, when, hearing of the order to arrest him, he fled with the Tlascalan for sanctuary to the temple. The maiden was previously betrothed to a youth, who, like this Montezuma, has been conspicuous in this revolt! She firmly resisted all dishonorable proposals of the prince, and when he proposed to elevate her to the throne, she scorned him, accused him of his treachery to thee and me, and so enraged him, that he determined to sacrifice her. He therefore bore her with him to the temple, and dedicated her to the deity.'

'Did this foul prince confess all this?' she asked, with surprise and detestation strongly portrayed upon her expressive features.

'He confessed it calmly, but with the subdued tone of exultation that evinced the gratification it gave him to lay before my astonished eyes the black map of his well-schemed villainy.'

'It was the malicious confession of a desperate and bad man,' said the princess. 'Alas, I feel for this poor virgin! She must be saved!'

'It is impossible! It were wresting the very laurels of the gods from their brows! It were impiety.'

'Will no other substitute be accepted?'

'None, save the deity himself should point one out by some extraordinary interposition.'

'Hath this ever been done?'

'Never. The maiden must die.'

'Alas, Montezuma!' she sighed, sympathizing with the brother when it should reach his ears.

'There is one who will feel it deeper than he,' said the emperor, who little knew the depth of feeling from which that exclamation came; 'her lover, Sismarqui, who came even to the prince's room in search of her, and was found there by Lord Cuiri, and mainly contributed to the prince's arrest.'

He was himself arrested, by my command, for the part he has taken in the revolt.'

'Confessed the prince further, sir?'

'No, save that he had truly loved you, but that he had loved ambition more, and that he forgave you, for you knew him better than, until then, he knew himself. The princess was silent, and the emperor added: 'I then asked him if he declined the trial of the throne. "Yes," was his reply. I then told him he should receive my sentence in the morning, and that I trusted he would meet his fate with the fortitude of a prince.'

'Must he die?' she asked, earnestly.

'By to-morrow's sun rise,' was the stern reply of the emperor. 'The fatal cup hath already been commanded to be prepared. Nay, princess! this traitor's fate should not move thee!'

'We have been children together, sire, and I cannot but recall a period of time when once he was innocent. Besides, I believe he sincerely loved me!'

'Thou must school thy heart to forget him. This is a weakness that is nearly allied to sympathy with guilt. Think of him as of the dead.'

'I will speak of him no more, sire! Alas, that he hath so fallen! There was still a cord that bound him to my heart I knew not of, till I did now feel it part,' she said, inaudibly. 'Fare thee well now, prince! I have let thee go forever.'

The emperor watched her face a few moments, until he saw she had conquered her feelings, and then said—

'Thou knowest, Evlla, that the cycle of my government expires on the twentieth day from this, and that, by the provision of our imperial laws,

framed by the gods, I then immediately resign my crown and sceptre to my successor. Thou, Eylla, art destined to take my throne! Thou wilt be sole empress, while I, retiring to the temple, devote the remnant of my days to heaven.'

'Oh, may they be prolonged, that I may ever have thee as my guide and councillor,' she said fervently.

'Thou art a good child, and will make a good ruler of the empire. But, Eylla, the race of the Aztec emperors, who, for seven centuries, have sat on the throne, must not end with thee.'

'My father,' said the princess, bending her face to the earth, while her heart began to throb with alarm.

'Nay, this *must* be spoken of,' he said, with kindness. 'I would have thee wed some one, who will make thee happy, and who will be worthy of thee. I must look among the nobles now. I have thought of the Lord Cuirí, who hath some princely blood in him, and of the gallant Lord Esquiltl, his cousin, who hath this night saved the empire. He hath, therefore, won it.'

'I pray you, speak not to me on this theme,' she said, with feeling, yet with firmness.

'Hast thou aught to say against either?'

'They are both honorable men, and brave knights; but speak not to me of them, I implore you, my dear father.'

'Has thy heart a preference for any noble in the empire, who is worthy of thee?'

'No.'

'Eylla, thou must consider of this matter,' said the emperor, impressively. 'I would make thee and thy reign happy.'

'Not thus, — not thus!'

'I will leave thee to think of it,' he said, kissing her on the forehead. 'Tis somewhat sudden; but I trust thy love for me and the future welfare of the empire will induce thee to make some sacrifice.'

'I would make every sacrifice for thee, my father — but — 'tis sudden. Give me time to consider upon it.'

'If thou wouldst let thy thoughts go more towards Lord Esquiltl than the Lord Cuirí, thou wouldst best please my humor,' he said, smiling, and rising to leave the apartment. 'I will question, and propose it to these lords.'

'Your majesty,' said Tzitzis, entering the chamber, with a silver scroll in her hand, 'a courier, who says he comes from Lord Esquiltl, inquired if thou wert with the princess, and desired me to hand this to your majesty.'

'From Esquiltl! Then shall we know the issue of this rebellion,' he said, breaking the gold thread, with which it was tied.

'Your majesty,' he read aloud, 'will please to learn that the insurgents are put down. The leaders, — Montezuma, Hucha, and one or two others, — are made prisoners. The city is again quiet. I have sent the prisoners to the castle. I shall presently be at the palace, to make my report in person to your majesty. ESQUILTl.'

The princess listened till her worst fears were confirmed, by this intelligence of Montezuma's arrest. She then, wholly overcome by her feelings, fainted away. The emperor was alarmed, and filled with wonder, at the occurrence. Tzitzis flew to her assistance, and with the aid of both she soon revived. She instantly felt that she had been guilty of a dangerous weakness, in thus exposing the state of her feelings. Her first glance rested on the face of the maiden, inquiringly, as if to ask her if she had betrayed her-

self. The Peruvian shook her head. She then sought the expression of the emperor's countenance, and discovered only alarm and wonder. By a strong effort of her mind she recovered herself, and resolved to guard her emotions until she could safely indulge them. The emperor had not suspected the cause, and, after a moment's reflection, could refer it to none other than joy at the happy issue of the rebellion. With this impression, he spoke.

'We may well give way to joy, my daughter, at this prompt termination of this revolt. If it had not been for the early discovery made of it by Lord Esquitl, and his noble conduct in action since, it would have got to a head that no power could have crushed. But methinks I heard it was known to thee, as well as to this young nobleman,' he said, recollecting at that moment the words of Sismarqui.

The princess started, and looked confused, while Tzitzis, anxious to relieve her mistress, said, with address,

'I found a youth, your majesty, near the water-side, and led him to the princess, from whom she got it.'

'Is this truth, Eylla?'

'He gave me information of a contemplated revolt, and I sent him, bidding him, in my name, to intreat the people to remain quiet, and that when I came to the throne I would redress such grievances as they complained of.'

'T was a bold promise. Thou couldst no sooner redress one, than two more would rise up in its place. The people are never satisfied. There is but one way to govern them, and that is by making the very power that awes them a grievance that shall swallow up all others. You see they heeded not your wishes. I sent Esquitl, with some thousands of men-at-arms, and you see he hath given a good account of them. Was not this youth called Montezuma?'

'It was his name, sire,' answered the princess, with composure, assumed from a deep sense of its necessity at such a time. For an instant, she imagined her heart's secret was discovered. She knew that instant death would punish both her love and his ambition. But a second glance at the emperor's face reassured her.

'Why did you keep the intelligence from me, when another hour's delay, had not Esquitl discovered it, would have endangered the safety of the realm? Methinks you had great confidence in this serf, Montezuma. His head shall come to the block to-morrow, and so shall this Sismarqui's,' said the emperor, in a stern and angry voice.

The Princess Eylla trembled, and remained silent; but her thoughts were busy in running over a hundred plans for her lover's safety. At this moment, one of the emperor's attendants came in.

'Your majesty, the Lord Esquitl is without, and waits your pleasure.'

'Admit him hither.'

'Not here, my father,' said the princess.

'Where can a successful soldier be so well received, on his return, as in the presence of beauty? My lord, you are welcome. I owe you service for your address and consummate generalship. The princess will thank you in person for saving her empire, and bringing these insurgent leaders to submission and to the block.'

The young noble laid his hand upon his heart, and bent low before her, at these words, and said gallantly,

'My life is ever at the disposal of my maiden sovereign.'

'I thank your lordship,' said the princess, in a low, embarrassed tone.

'This is sorry thanks,' said the emperor, reprovingly. 'My lord, she is something ill at ease from recent events that have transpired. Where have you placed the prisoners?'

'The leader, Montezuma, I have placed in the cell adjoining the Axusco dungeon. Hucha, a hunchback, and the most active leader of the revolt, I have placed in a cell adjoining it. Some other prisoners of less note are in chains in the castle keep.'

'Tis well, my lord. Princess, thou wilt entertain my noble general here until I return. I go to prepare for the further security of the city and throne.' Thus speaking, his majesty instantly left the apartment. The princess was vexed, distressed, and pained above measure, herein plainly seeing her father's object, and knowing by it his firmness of purpose. She held the young nobleman in the highest regard, and admired him for his bravery, and high, chivalrous qualities. With feelings of a more tender nature she had never once thought of him. She was silent, and for a moment, seeing her so embarrassed, he remained so. At length he approached her, as if to relieve her.

'Gracious princess, I beg leave to return you your signet, which this Montezuma, possessing himself of by some means, showed to the people to induce them, for some end of his own, to defer rising in arms to-night. It was taken from him by the men-at-arms.' With these words, he presented it to her on bended knee.

'I thank your care for it, my lord,' she said, coldly receiving it.

'Your highness is displeased,' he said, as if hurt by her manner.

'No, my lord,' she replied, her voice tremulous with some sudden emotion. 'My Lord Esquitl,'—she stopped, attempted to address him again, and then burst into tears.

Struck with amazement and sympathy, he remained petrified. Of what had he been guilty? How had he wounded her feelings? He could not explain it, and gave it up, as a good knight should do when perplexed to know why a pretty woman sheds tears, when she hath a mind,—a mazy labyrinth,—which many an honest cavalier hath been sorely entangled in.

'My lord,' she at length said, with deep energy of feeling; 'I must cast myself on your generosity.'

'Name what I can do to serve you, noble princess, and it shall be done.'

'Thou knowest the prince hath — hath —'

'I have heard it, your highness,' he said, understanding her.

'The emperor would now unite me, my lord, to a noble of the empire, without my will. He will speak to you upon the subject. Though I esteem this nobleman, I can never give my hand where I have not first given my heart.'

'You may depend upon my desire to serve you,' he said, earnestly.

'Will you, then, tell my father that you do not consent to it?'

'As boldly as you would wish. But I fear me, your highness, he will little heed me.'

'He hath resolved to leave it to yourself and the Lord Cuiiri. Yet your opposition may cost you his displeasure, my lord.'

'I would think of your favor, and forget it.'

'It may cost you your life, my lord.'

'I can never lay it down so well as in the service of my beloved princess.'

'I would, my lord, I could reward your devotion as I could wish to. You have relieved my heart of a heavy weight.'

'What says Lord Cuiri, your highness?'

'I have not yet spoken with him. I do expect him hither soon.'

'May I ask your highness who is this favored, yet unfavored, noble?' inquired Lord Esquitl, with a smile.

'The emperor will inform you, my lord,' said the princess, with a degree of embarrassment that did not escape him. 'Ah! well, maiden, what is it?' she asked, as Tzitzis came in from the ante-room.

'The Lord Cuiri hath been looking for your highness in your own apartments, that he hath not been here sooner. He is without.'

'Admit him.'

The young nobleman started on beholding the Lord Esquitl with the princess; but, recovering himself, made a profound and almost worshipping obeisance to the princess, and said —

'I have obeyed your highness' commands.'

'I have learned the painful result from the emperor, my lord, who has just left me, desiring me to entertain the Lord Esquitl till his present return. I fear me I have been but a dull entertainer.'

'I congratulate you, Esquitl,' said Lord Cuiri, whom the brief explanation of the princess had relieved from a slight pang of jealousy that shot through his heart, 'on your brilliant achievement to-night.'

'It was a noisy affair while it lasted, but not a very agreeable one. It was a slaughter, not a battle.'

'T was strange the people should rise in this manner! I supposed them peaceful and happy, under the long-established government of this throne. It has been a stirring night, both within and without the palace.'

'My Lord Cuiri!' spoke the princess, abruptly, yet with emotion.

'Your highness.'

'The emperor, my father, whom I deeply love, as you do well know, and for whom, but for his evil ambition, I was ready to have sacrificed myself to the Prince Palipan, hath, within the hour, desired me to espouse one of the nobles of the court.'

'Your highness surprises me!' cried the nobleman.

'I cannot obey him. Although, were circumstances different from what they are, I might love, as now I esteem and honor, this noble; but, as I am now situated, I cannot give him my heart, without which my hand were worthless.'

'Well, your highness,' said the young nobleman, glancing his eyes towards Lord Esquitl, who, observing him, slightly smiled, as if he knew more than he did know.

'The emperor is informed of my indisposition to this union — nay, of my firm refusal to consent to it; yet, anxiously desiring it to take place, he hath decided to refer it to yourself and Lord Esquitl. It will rest on your lordships' decisions.'

The suspicions he had began to entertain in reference to Lord Esquitl were instantly dissipated by her final words, which seemed to exclude that nobleman, as well as himself, from this honor designed by the emperor.

'Does your highness consent to this umirage?'

'Cheerfully, knowing that I can fear no decision from you that will give me pain.'

'Your highness may depend upon me to oppose it, when my decision shall be required by the emperor.'

'Lord Esquitl hath pledged himself to do the same. I ask no more of

either of you, my lords, than this. You have increased my esteem for you. What iron key hast thou stuck in thy silken belt, my Lord Esquitl?' she inquired, abruptly, her eyes suddenly sparkling. 'Tis a new fashion of the court.'

'The key of the cell in which this Montezuma is locked up. I should have given it to his majesty when here, that he might appoint a jailer and a guard.'

'Give it to me, my lord. I will hand it to my father,' she said, quietly.

He placed it on the table beside her, and said —

'I will intrude no further on your highness' courtesy. I have duties that call me forth. Depend upon my loyalty and devotion.'

'I do, my lord, and do sincerely wish I could give you a more grateful return.'

Lord Cuiri also took his leave, and left the princess once more alone with her Peruvian slave.

'Tzitzis,' she said quickly.

'Your highness.'

'Do you know the way to the dungeon in which the rebel lord, Axuzco, was confined?'

'Yes, your highness, I could find it.'

'Take this key, be fleet and secret! Open the dungeon adjoining, and lead privately hither the prisoner.'

'Montezuma?'

'Who else, maiden?'

'I can scarcely lift the key, your highness,' she said, letting it fall heavily upon the floor. 'I can never turn, with my strength, the bolt to which it belongs.'

'No, thou couldst not. Alas! I have no one to trust.'

'There is one in the palace I can confide in, your highness.'

'No, no! not in thy lover! he is one of the imperial guard! It is a perilous secret!'

I mean not Elic. It is one who came hither with Montezuma, and, by some means, could not get out from the palace without detection. I once, by address, rescued him by Montezuma's desire, as he beheld him on his way to the postern, in danger of being arrested.'

'He is trusty, then, if he is Montezuma's friend. Bring him hither.'

'I left him in the ante-room, disguised as an attendant, but the fool, Sulukis, induced him to leave it, with the promise of aiding his escape from the palace. I met them near the rotunda, where the jester, instead of aiding his friend, was proclaiming, in a loud voice, to a group of listeners, what a rare virtue the slave had of changing himself, averring, that he could say "*presto!*" and turn him into a waterman before their eyes. I succeeded in getting him from his peril for a third time, and he is now in the ante-room.'

'I would see him.'

The next instant Casipeti stood in the presence of the princess.

'Art thou a friend to Montezuma?'

'I am, noble princess.'

'He is in prison. This key will liberate him. The maiden will guide you thither. Go, free him, and conduct him hither. Be secret, cautious, and bold!'

'His person must be disguised, your highness,' said Tzitzis, turning back from the door.

'Thou hast well thought of it.'

'There is a slave's dress in the ante-room,' your highness.

Let that shroud his person. It shall soon give place to an imperial robe!' she added, in a tone that only reached the maiden's ear.

Cuipeti then received the key from her hands, and, preceded by Tzitzis, bearing a lighted torch, with the slave's habit on his arm, quitted the chamber by a door opposite to that by which the emperor had retired from the apartment.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PRINCE AND HEADSMAN.

EARLY the ensuing morning, the emperor was seated in his cabinet. In his hand he held a scroll, bound with a crimson thread, and sealed with the symbol of death. At his feet silently knelt a man in black garments, with a mask upon his face. The countenance of the emperor was stern, and his firm mouth was compressed with resolution.

'Thou wilt bear this scroll to the Prince Palipan, sir headsman, as I have commanded thee. Hast thou the cup?'

'It is here, your majesty,' answered the man, in a low, deep voice, uncovering his left hand, and exposing to his view a small golden goblet, shut with a cover.

'It is well. Go, do thine office. Mark closely how he receives the message, and how he beareth himself. I would question thee after.'

The executioner rose from his knees, and silently left the presence of the monarch.

The sun shone brightly through a casement into the room in which the prince was confined. He was alone; for the emperor had given orders for the guards, which Lord Cuiri had posted in his apartments, to keep their guard at the doors, and leave him to the solitude of his own soul. He was seated, or rather reclining, with an air of lassitude, upon an ottoman. His face was thoughtful, but calm; yet, at times, an expression of mental agony would dart across his features, showing the state of the tortured spirit within. He had been defeated, disappointed, degraded! He was, therefore, disgusted with life, and desired to die. He was brooding over his dark fate, when a step caught his ear. He looked quickly up, as if having been in expectation of it. The executioner slowly entered the chamber. The hapless prince's fortitude forsook him at the sight, and he sunk back upon the divan, and covered his face with his hands. The struggle was but momentary! He again lifted his face, from which, save that it was like marble for its whiteness, all emotion had vanished. The minister of death approached, and kneeling before him, silently presented the scroll he held. A shudder ran over the prince's frame, as he extended his almost lifeless hand to receive it. He opened it, however, with considerable composure, and read the contents aloud, in an even tone:—

'NEPHEW, — The gods gave you life to elevate you, by its proper use, to equality, after death, with themselves. You have defeated this intention of

your existence. The deity waits to receive back the gift of which you have proved yourself unworthy. Degraded, dishonored, and despised, you can no longer wish to live, and, like a brave man, have professed your desire to die. This last virtuous wish, unhappy prince, I have seen fit to enable you to fulfil, although, if I measured your punishment by your guilt, I should condemn you to live. May the river of death purify thy soul, and may the gods yet grant you to begin a new existence in another state! Thou wilt find the last best gift of heaven to man that hath outlived his honor, in the cup I send thee! I commend thee to the gods.

ULYD, *Emperor.*

The prince dropped the hand that held the fatal scroll faintly by his side, and for a moment he seemed to labor under the most terrific emotion. His brow became flushed with the rushing current of blood from his heart, and every fibre in his body seemed to be strung to its utmost tensity, by the pressure of the struggling spirit within. He sprung to his feet, and rapidly walked the floor for a few minutes. At length he stood still, with his face up-turned to the morning sun, stretched forth his hands towards the bright orb, and moved his lips, but in silence. After a brief prayer, his face became again composed, but pale; and walking towards the executioner, he said, sternly —

'Why dost thou fear to show me that which thou hidest in the folds of thy mantle. Place it on the table!'

The executioner obeyed, and retired a few paces from the spot. The prince approached, with a firm step, and took the cup in his hand. He then removed the cover, and calmly surveyed the colorless draught.

'This, then, is the water of life immortal! This, then, is the Lethæ of all mortal grief! This quaffed, and it will matter not to me if I have missed a throne, or won it — whether I have lived a serf or prince! This heals all heart wounds, all injuries of the spirit of man. It is, truly, the best gift of the gods to a man who hath lived long enough! It will bear me far beyond my cousin's scorn, the emperor's wrath, and all men's tongues! It will open my prison doors, and give me the liberty of the skies! Well, I am sick of life. Crime hath never prospered with me, and I do begin to feel assured 'tis never countenanced by the gods! If they are virtuous, and punish guilt, then I may fly to an evil greater than that I suffer. But this is torture! that can be no more, and present death will at least shorten that which longer life would have in store for me. So I will accept my uncle's charitable gift. 'T is but a draught, and all is over!'

He approached the goblet to his lip, shuddered, and replaced it upon the table. For a moment his face was livid! He made a silent gesture without looking towards him, to the executioner.

'Dost thou know the principle here hidden?' he asked, in a voice that seemed to come from the grave.

'*Death!* your highness,' answered the man, in an impressive voice.

'But I would ask if it give instant freedom to the spirit? If,' he continued, with painful earnestness, 'if there be no fearful struggles — no writhing agony of the limbs — no pangs of torturing horror — no appalling distortion of the countenance, with starting eye-balls and foaming lips!'

'No, your highness, it is instant as the lightning. The pulse throbs not twice after.'

'Go from me. I will take it,' he said with a composed voice, but with an expression on the face, from which even the executioner turned away his eyes

He again took up the cup, and brought it to his lip. His hand shook, and he appeared as if he would have fallen. He hurriedly replaced the goblet upon the table, and buried his face in his hands.

'T is horrible! *I feel I cannot die.* To leave the bright world, the pleasant skies, the birds and flowers, the smiling fields and glorious landscapes—the thousand pleasures and delights of life! I cannot seal with corruption these hands, these features, and this body, warm, glowing, and throbbing with life! To think that when that sunbeam that lies so brightly upon the floor, travels an inch further round, I shall be lying there, gazed upon by this man, a corse—a thing for dogs to lick, and rude men to handle.'

'Your highness, time waits,' said the executioner, sternly.

'Time! Nay, methinks it flies at fearful, fearful speed!' He then made an effort to compose himself, and succeeded.

A third time he took up the fatal goblet in his hand, and, turning to the executioner, said with a smile on his ghastly features,

'Be patient, good sir, I will not keep thee much longer waiting.'

He then approached the divan with a staggering step, and sat down upon it.

'I would fall decently when I die,' he said, in a tone of indescribable emotion, calm and subdued although it was, by his resolution to die. 'Executioner, tell the princess I do confess the deep wrongs I have done her! Tell her I have loved her—*loved* her with all my heart—but, but—even her image could not purify the heart in which it was enshrined! Tell my uncle, the emperor, that I confess the justice of my doom. Now may the gods receive my soul.'

He raised the cup with a firm hand to his lips—hesitated—withdrew it a little distance, and looked slowly around the room, upon each object it contained, then up to the bright skies. Here his gaze lingered an instant, and then, closing his eyes, he raised the goblet steadily to his lips, and drank off the contents. He remained in the same position for an instant afterwards; the cup then dropped from his hands, his face became rigid, and he fell back upon the pillow—a corpse.

A few moments after the departure of the executioner from the cabinet of the emperor, Lord Esquitl entered. He was no longer habited in the suit of armor he wore the night before, but in the rich costume of the court, his only armor being an elegant gilt steel cuirass, and a sword by his side.

'I have sent for you, my Lord Esquitl,' said the emperor, advancing a step towards the noble youth, and addressing him in a tone calculated to inspire confidence, 'to talk with you on a subject very near to my heart.'

'I listen to your majesty,' said the young soldier, his thoughts instantly referring to the communication made to him by the princess.

'The Prince Palipan hath, ere this, received my command to make use of the only remedy left to him.'

'Death, your majesty?'

'He hath consented to it. The executioner hath borne to him the fatal draught that wipes out his dishonor and that of his race.'

Lord Esquitl was moved by this intelligence for a moment, and took two or three steps aside to recover himself. At length he said,

'T is pitiful! But he deserved it. Is the vile Tlascalan to be punished?'

'He was beheaded before dawn. Methinks the earth breathes freer.'

This ~~news~~, my lord, will leave the throne without a male occupant.

The princess will soon ascend it, and if I find not a husband for her in this wicked prince's place, I shall behold the end of my line. The sceptre of the empire, which heaven hath placed in my hand, must not be cast to the earth. It becomes both my gratitude to the gods, as well as my imperial honor and human ambition, to leave my throne to my children's children!

'Your majesty utters sentiments to which every true heart in the empire will respond.'

'I know it, my lord. Therefore would I see that this matter I have on my mind be brought to issue. Look ye, my lord!' he said, abruptly, 'I have decided to give the hand of my daughter, on the day of her coronation, to a noble of the empire. The Inca of Peru hath twice sent a mission to my court to propose an alliance between his son and her. But I have feared to look this way, as I like not the policy of that empire, and I should fear its influence on this! It would be casting my empire into his lap! It would be all Peru.'

'What saith the princess?'

'I never spoke to her of the proposal, looking then to betroth her to my nephew.'

'Does your majesty consider it now?'

'No — not if I can find a noble in the realm worthy of her. I have one in my mind, whom I would cheerfully give her to!'

'Your majesty, I should fear more the princess' union with a noble, than even with the Inca's son,' said the young lord, remembering his promise to the princess.

'Dost say thus? How means your lordship?' demanded the monarch, with surprise.

'It would rouse the jealousy of the rest, and endanger the stability of the throne you would consolidate by this measure.'

'There is some truth in this. Nevertheless, I have such faith in the wisdom, courage, and military genius of this noble, that I should fear little but he would keep that I gave him.'

'How does the princess Eylla regard the wishes of your majesty?'

'Not kindly. Yet he is worthy of her, my lord.'

'I pray your majesty, act not in opposition to her wishes.'

'She *must* marry, my lord!' said the monarch, in a determined tone. 'She has no one in her eye, and I therefore choose for her. If he consents, she shall be his.'

'He will never consent, your majesty, if he have knowledge of her reluctance,' said Lord Esquitl boldly.

'No?' exclaimed his majesty, fixing his eyes wide upon the face of the young man. 'This is bold! My wishes are my commands.'

'It is true, your majesty; but still, were he an honorable knight and true-hearted man, he would sooner incur your displeasure than be the instrument of unhappiness to the princess.'

'By the black eagle of Aztec! thou art a free-spoken youth,' said the emperor, with high displeasure. 'What if thou hadst been this noble?'

'I still would have answered as I have done, your majesty,' was the firm reply.

'Then thou hast already answered. Thou art he I would thus have honored. But, my lord, I like not thy spirit. It is of the same traitorous stamp that hath shipwrecked Prince Palipan. If I followed my will and thy desert, I would place thee under arrest!'

'I pray your majesty, pardon me,' said the young lord, who had been a little surprised at the discovery of the honor intended him, and who could not but smile at the extraordinary part the princess had given him to play against himself. 'Nevertheless,' thought he, 'if she can love me not, I do not repent what I have spoken. I would not, to be emperor, make her unhappy. I wonder if my Lord Cuiri is also a victim to this sweet tactician! His majesty may have proposed us both to her! Methinks if it were so, I would like to hear my lord, who really loves her, take up her cause against his own dearest interests.'

'My lord, I shall punish you no farther than you have punished yourself by your opposition to my wishes,' said the emperor calmly. 'Our interview is at an end, my lord.'

The young nobleman retired, with more regard for the princess than before, and, displeased with the emperor for desiring to make him the instrument of his own plans, notwithstanding the rich prize. But he was too high-minded and generous, and far too disinterested, to purchase even a throne with the tears of a maiden. 'Methinks,' he said, as he entered the rotunda from the emperor's chambers, 'that Lord Cuiri will be the next emperor; for she said that it depended on my decision and his. I have given in mine to his majesty, i' faith. Cuiri, if the emperor plays the same line with him, will, for his love, assuredly repent himself, and accept the princess. Yet, truly, she loves him no more than she does me. Yet, she did speak well of me to my face, I, ignorantly wondering the while, what lucky rogue was so well liked, yet so badly loved! Well, I am determined to aid her highness, in this matter, to the end. I do believe that she has her heart on some one. A woman,' he added, smiling, 'situated as the princess is, under the circumstances, would not so decidedly oppose so well-favored a cavalier as myself, -- who hath done such execution of late among her rebel subjects, -- or my Lord Cuiri even, who loves her to adoration. Yonder is my cousin, Cuiri, looking as meditative as if he were thinking of this very thing. There walks towards him a messenger from the emperor. My life on it, he will have the proposal made to him.'

Lord Cuiri instantly followed the messenger to the cabinet of the emperor. 'Ah, my lord,' said Esquitl, laughing lightly as he passed him, 'if thou wouldst be wise, presently repent thy pledge, given to the princess last night.'

'Hast thou done it?' demanded the noble, quickly, and with a look of suspicion.

'I pray thee, question his majesty, cousin,' he replied, as the nobleman passed on his way. 'Now I do pity from my heart, poor Cuiri. He will suspect any other than himself to be in the emperor's mind; and, for very jealousy, will deal hard knocks, that will only fall on his own pate. This pretty princess hath given him a sad task. He will never forgive her for it -- never. He is too sensitive ever to forget such an involuntary use of himself to batter his own brains out.' With these words, he walked away and mingled with the courtiers in the hall of attendance.

The emperor was looking from a window when Lord Cuiri entered his cabinet, and did not notice him.

'I have obeyed your majesty's commands,' he said, advancing to within a few paces of the window.

His majesty turned suddenly round, and stood, for a few moments, with a hesitating manner, as if undetermined how to open the subject to him. At length he asked, in a tone of assumed indifference,

'Hast thou seen the princess this morning, my Lord Cuiiri?'

'No, your majesty. I trust she hath not suffered from the painful scenes of yesterday.'

'I have not sent to her chambers; but a woman's spirit can endure much without breaking, my lord.'

'The princess hath great fortitude.'

'I am glad to hear thee speak thus honorably of her. She is a noble maiden. I deeply regret this unfortunate affair of my nephew, that hath left the throne without a prince.'

'She liked him not ever, I believe, your majesty,' said Lord Cuiiri, with animation.

'Had he not shown openly this evil of his nature, she would have been induced to espouse him, nevertheless, my lord. As it is, there is no further consideration of it. The prince is by this time dead.'

'By his own hand!' exclaimed Lord Cuiiri.

'By my command. He hath become his own executioner.'

'Is this indeed true, your majesty?' inquired the young nobleman, between surprise and pleasure. 'Then hath your majesty removed from the state one of its most dangerous enemies.'

'I do feel well assured I have done so, my lord. I wait but the return of the executioner, to bring me tidings of his death. This event, my lord, will leave the hand of the princess free.'

The young man's heart throbbed harder, and his cheek grew flushed with anticipation. The emperor placed his eyes upon him, and seemed to wait for him to speak.

'I have thought of it, your majesty,' he said, scarcely knowing what he said.

'Ah, indeed, my lord!' exclaimed the emperor, lifting his eye-brows with surprise.

'It did occur to me, your majesty.'

'Naturally. It has occurred to me, too. I have chosen a nobleman to her husband instead.'

'Hast thou consulted her, your majesty?'

'I consult alone my own will, and the happiness of my empire,' answered the emperor, haughtily. 'I ask your lordship's opinion of such a union.'

'May I know, your majesty, the name of the individual so distinguished by your regard?'

'It is one who has other claims to it, besides his own merits,—that of being connected by blood with the throne.'

'Lord Esquitl!' exclaimed the young nobleman, turning pale.

'Lord Esquitl is but related to *thee*—*thou* to the throne.'

'Your majesty does not mean—'

'But I *do* mean thyself. Why this consternation? Wilt thou also kick at the throne, as thy foolish cousin has done?'

The young nobleman hardly heard or understood. His mind was bewildered with surprise, delight, perplexity. It was, then, himself, the princess desired him to plead against with the emperor. He saw through her design, so skillfully and delicately conceived, and his heart smote him. The throne—the hand of the princess—was within his grasp. His deep love for her tempted him to stretch forth his hand to seize it. His love, on the contrary, also caused him to shrink from being the instrument of her oppression. Besides, he recalled his pledge given to her firmly, and if need be,

with his life, to oppose any proposition of this nature, that should be referred to him. He then thought of her language: 'I esteem and honor this noble, my lord; but I can never give him my heart.' 'Yet,' thought he, 'I might teach her to love me, if I had the opportunity.' At length, his love got so the better of his fear of making her unhappy by accepting her hand, that he would, doubtless, have acceded to the proposal of the emperor, but for his word given to oppose it. Lord Cuiri had ambition as well as love; and ambition gave boldness to his love, and held out to him the hope of success in it.

'Well, my lord, have you thought sufficiently long upon this subject?'

'Indeed, your majesty, I pray you give me some days to ingratiate myself into the princess' affections. I could seek no higher happiness than this you have done me the honor to propose.'

'Then why not at once accept of it? Let me have the matter well at rest.'

'I would beg the privilege, first, of an interview with the princess, if it please your majesty,' said the young nobleman, who hoped, by boldly pressing his love, so long and secretly cherished, he might win the throne of her heart, and so receive from her hand the sceptre which the emperor would force upon him.

'You are not to obey the princess, my lord, but the emperor,' said the monarch, in a stern and commanding tone.

The young nobleman was perplexed. He felt he could not resign the princess, although she had, in as many words, plainly told him she could not love him. But what will not love hope for? He fondly trusted that by confessing his deep passion for her, he might at least awaken her pity, which he knew enough of woman's heart to believe could soon be deepened into a warmer sentiment. With these hopes he resolved to confess truly to the emperor the pledge he had given to the princess, conjointly with his cousin, and which led him to withhold his consent, and desire him to give him opportunity to win her heart. He, therefore, without reserve, laid the whole matter, including his long cherished love for the princess, before the surprised monarch. When he had ended, he waited with trembling hopes for his decision.

The emperor was silent for some time; and at length a smile gradually lighted up his features, for he had been amused, notwithstanding his displeasure, with the art of the Princess Eylla in getting rid of her two suitors.

'My lord,' he said, 'I acquit you of any intention to slight my proposition to you. I will permit you to woo the perverse maiden until the sixth day hence. But this permission is conditional; and I shall expect you, if unsuccessful in winning her affections in this time, to obey my commands, and win them, if you care for them then, after marriage.'

Lord Cuiri was silent for a moment; but, inspired by hopes of ultimate victory over the obdurate princess, he accepted the terms.

'I shall soon visit her chamber. I should have again seen her last night, after I left Lord Esquil there, but was detained by some pressing matters. At twelve o'clock, my lord, I shall ascend the throne of justice. Have these rebel leaders then brought before me. I would question them of this conspiracy, and its object, ere I condemn them to the block.'

Lord Cuiri then took his leave of the emperor, who was also in the act of quitting the cabinet for the apartment of the princess, when the door opened, as his hand was upon it, and the executioner entered.

'Ha! well!' exclaimed the monarch, quickly.

'He is dead.'

The emperor placed his hand for an instant to his forehead, as if painfully affected by the intelligence so abruptly communicated, although prepared to receive it.

'How died he?' he asked, recovering his composure.

'At first he lamented his fate; but after nature had shaken him, his spirit overcame the bodily weakness, and he died better than most men would have done, your majesty.'

'Did he die instantly?'

'His heart became still ere he had dropped the drained goblet.'

'You speak of this too coolly, sirrah!' cried the emperor, with disgust; 'but 't is your profession. Away!'

The headsman left the apartment by a secret passage, which communicated with his own quarter of the palace.

'Alas, alas, my poor, misguided nephew! Thou art no more, and I forgive thee—for the gods now have thee in judgment. Mortal men have naught more to do with thee, in love or hatred.'

'Good morning, cousin emperor,' said the jester, who at that instant entered, and pulled him by the mantle.

'Ha, fool! carry thy mummery to the courtiers; I am ill at ease.'

'Therefore shouldst thou ha' my society, cousin. I have a secret for thee!' he added, with a look of profound importance.

'Nay—go to!' said the emperor, hastily.

'Where dost *thou* go to?'

'To the princess' chamber.'

'That's my secret,' said the fool, placing his finger on his lip, and looking serious.

'What dost thou mean, sirrah?'

'Thou art in bad humor this morning, cousin! If I tell thee, I shall get my pate broken. Yet there hangs an odor o' treason about the matter.'

'Out with it, then, if thou hast aught to tell me, or thou wilt get a broken pate for keeping silence,' said the emperor, irritated; for the looks of the jester led him to believe he had possession of some intelligence of importance.

'Is it true, gossip, thou hast killed the poor prince?'

'Is this thy secret! Thou wilt behold him laid in state to-morrow, for the empire to gaze upon, that they may see the emperor can be just, even with his own blood,' answered the monarch, rather addressing himself than the fool. 'Leave the cabinet! or, if thou wilt, remain here; do thou follow not me!'

'Go not in there, cousin; thou wilt frighten a pair o' doves an' thou dost,' he said, mischievously, and with a deeper meaning in his twinkling eyes than his words conveyed.

'Rogue,' said the emperor, angrily, turning back from the princess' door, and seizing him by the arm, 'there is something at thy heart which thou wouldst fain trust to thy tongue.'

'Mercy, sweet gossip! said I not you were in the gross humors?' he cried, terrified.

'What hast thou to say? What mean thy hints?'

'Nay—you hurt, gossip! Now, I can breathe again. Thou art good at a pinch, co'sin. Well, the secret is, that I have seen what I would not ha'

believe I had I not seen it. Thou knowest I every morning, at sunrise, repair to the altar in the empress' little oratory, to weep and pray for her! I got there, gossip, (when the rooms were closed,) by a sliding panel behind the altar. Many a rare crying time I ha' had o' it there!

'Well, come to the end,' commanded the impatient emperor.

'This morning, gossip, I went something later, for I was not able to sleep last night for the motions and notions going forward, turning the palace upside down, and driving sleep from honest persons' eyes, and so I napped it after sunrise. Well, I opened the panel to glide in, when what should I see but the Princess Eylla there.'

'Fool, she hath taken the rooms for the present.'

'But hath a tall, handsome youth, wi' black bright eyes, and a sunny smile, taken them with her, cousin?'

'What meanest thou?' demanded the emperor, surprised.

The Princess Eylla was sitting on a divan, and the youth, who looked and dressed every inch a prince, was seated on the ground at her feet, looking dove-eyes up at her, and she was looking dove-eyes down at him. It were a proper sight for a modest youth like me, gossip, and so I crept off to bring thee to view it. It passed my comprehension, and spoilt my prayers.'

'Didst thou see this, Sulukis?' demanded the emperor, his plainest suspicions roused.

'Do I see thee, gossip! I ha' not shed a tear or said a prayer this morning for the circumstance.'

'Didst thou know him? Is he one of the courtiers?'

'He hath never been seen i' the palace in my day,' answered the jester, decidedly.

The emperor reflected a moment, and then said, sternly, 'Remain thou here, nor speak of what thou hast seen, on pain of my displeasure.' Thus speaking, he instantly left the cabinet, and entered the suite of rooms terminating in the chamber then occupied by the princess. Before he reached her door, he turned back, and despatched the jester for Lord Esquitl. That nobleman instantly made his appearance.

'My lord, follow me to the rooms occupied by the Princess Eylla, with a file of men-at-arms!'

The nobleman, amazed, silently disappeared, and the emperor proceeded towards her apartment, his face and manner divested of all excitement or traces of suspicion.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LOVERS.

CASIPETI, after having unlocked the door, and released Montezuma from the cell, left him to the guidance of Tzitzis, anxious himself to quit the palace, where constant danger awaited him, and return to his house in the city. He succeeded, soon afterwards, under cover of his slave's costume, in evading the guards, who regarded less who went out than those who entered. As he was passing the post, he saw, with pleasure, the mascal, whom some

one had identified, liberated from his confinement, and sent lamenting to his chambers. It is needless to say that Montezuma obeyed with alacrity the command of the princess, and followed Tzitzis, without delay, to the presence of the mistress of his heart.

Hours passed away, and the princess and Montezuma were seated by the casement, discoursing on those tender themes that are so dear to lovers, which in themselves are light as air and nothing, but which to them are every thing! As violets that grow in couples are sweetest scented, so sweeter and deeper grew their love for this intermingling of their young hearts. In a politic female, it would have been policy to have cherished the love of a handsome and bold young man, whose word could arm fifty thousand men within the capital's walls; and, in the prospect of her coming to the throne, the most refined diplomacy to have secured the stability of her empire, by inviting so dangerous a person, as he might have proved, to share it with her. But Princess Eylla was no politician, and knew little of diplomacy, save that of the heart.

By her command, Montezuma, on his first entrance from the prison, exchanged his slave's costume for a suit which she sent Tzitzis to bring her from the emperor's wardrobe. It became the majestic height and manly beauty of his person; and as they sat together, as the morning sun shone into the casement, he looked every inch a prince. Such he now knew himself to be; and although he spoke not of it to the princess, she saw and rejoiced in the change the knowledge of his high lineage had produced in his air, bearing, and general demeanor, attributing it, with something of truth, to the elevating and magical influence of love.

They were engaged, as the fool had discovered them — Montezuma reclining at her feet, listening to a tale of Peruvian chivalry from the lips of the princess. Secure in the secrecy of the apartment which she had made his 'prison,' as she playfully termed it, until she could safely open to the emperor the resolution of her heart, she gave herself up to the happiness of the present moment.

The emperor tapped gently on the door of the outer apartment. The watchful Tzitzis sprang to it and opened it, and the next instant was about to fly to the oratory to give the alarm, when the monarch, perceiving her intention, seized her by the arm, forcibly placed her in the outer room, and turned the bolt upon her. The next instant Lord Esquil appeared in the main entrance to the apartment, leading from the court of the fountain. Close behind him were the men-at-arms. The emperor made him a sign to remain there, and then, with a quick, light step, crossed over to the door of the oratory. It was ajar, for thus it became the princess, and she depended on the faithful slave to notify her of the emperor's approach. He discovered the lovers as the jester had truly related — Montezuma seated at the feet of his lovely mistress, attentively listening to her, with upward gaze, while she was relating some interesting legend of the Mountain of the Burning Stone, her snowy fingers the whilst half hidden amid his raven locks! He gazed an instant, without being able to identify the youth, upon the incredible scene, and then waving his hand to the guards, flung wide the door and entered.

'Seize the traitor!' he shouted, in a voice of thunder.

Montezuma sprang to his feet, and the princess shrieked, at the sound of the terrible voice, which gave the first intimation of his presence, and the next instant, true to her love and her womanhood, threw herself between the advancing soldiers and her lover. 'Back — touch him not!'

'Seize him!' repeated the monarch, with vehemence.

'No, no! Hold, I command!' she cried, grasping with both hands the points of the lances, and turning them aside.

'Spear the hound!' thundered the emperor.

'Through my heart, then, seek his!' she cried, clasping his form in her arms.

The guards hesitated. She caught this moment of indecision to turn and address the enraged monarch.

'Father, listen! Bid the guards wait without the door, (he cannot escape them!) and hear me one word.'

He gazed on her face penetratingly a moment, and then motioned the wondering and amazed Lord Esquitl to withdraw the soldiers from the room.

'So this is the pretty princess' offset to Cuiri and myself,' he said, gravely shaking his head, yet smiling at the singular discovery; 'this is the secret of this Montezuma's possession of the signet — her influence over him in this revolt! The key I gave her hath let him out of prison. How artful love makes a woman! The emperor hath not yet recognised him. By mine honor, if he escape for seven days, and manage to keep his head on his shoulders on the eighth, she'll put a crown on it, or may I never hope to see Lord Cuiri when he heareth this! Well, I will stand by the princess, and if she honor this Montezuma, what care I, so he rival me not. Doubtless he will make a far better emperor than the prince.'

Thus philosophically mused the light-hearted young nobleman, at this extraordinary event; but he awaited the issue with the deepest curiosity and interest. He closed the door, and the three were left together; the monarch, restless as a caged tiger, pacing near the door; Eylla looking imploringly towards him; the young man standing silent, proud, and calm. At length the emperor stopped full before her.

'Now, traitress?'

'Nay, I am wanting nothing in my love or loyalty to my emperor and father,' she said, approaching near, and kneeling before him; 'hear me, my father! You have once loved your Eylla! Have you forgotten how in childhood I sat upon your knee — and how, as I grew older, each morning I left upon your pillow the sweetest flowers, nor left your couch until you had kissed me? And when I got to be a maiden grown, and thou wert sick nigh unto death, how I watched thy couch and cooled thy brow; and did you not say I was a blessing to you, and that you owed your life to my tender nursing?'

'Eylla!'

'Thou art moved. I see returning love for thine only daughter in the gentle beaming of thy eye upon me, as I seek its light! Father, I know you love your own Eylla!'

As she ceased, she softly rose from his feet, and, like a child climbing a its parent's knee, slid upward into his arms, and laid her head confidingly upon his breast:

'What, Eylla? what would my child?' he said, in an affectionate tone. He looked tenderly down upon her as he spoke, and for the moment forgot the presence of the object of his displeasure.

'His life, father, and thy forgiveness!'

Her answer recalled him to himself. He flung her from him, yet still she clung to him, and strode sternly towards the young man.

'Ha! methinks I have seen that face!'

'Thou hast, emperor,' he answered with firmness.

'Who art thou?'

'Montezuma, the net-maker's son.'

'Princess, is it so? This slave — this serf thy paramour!'

'My betrothed husband.'

'Princess Eylla, thou liest with thy false tongue!'

'I have spoken the truth, father,' she answered, calmly but firmly.

'Then both your fates are sealed,' he said, with deliberate determination. The deepest dungeon of the prison shall be your abode till you get the better of this madness. But by the sacred eagle of the sun! if I had a doubt (yet I see why I should not have!) of thy honor, I would slay thee with my own hand, ere thy bosom heaved twice more.'

'Father, for my life I care not — the threat of the dungeon does not terrify me. It is thy displeasure that I feel. I am innocent.'

'I believe thee for mine own honor's sake,' he said bitterly; 'for after this, thy word hath little weight with me. Yet thou shalt not go unpunished! Ho, without there!' he cried, sternly. 'Take this woman prisoner!'

'Your majesty!' cried Lord Esquitl, as the emperor stood pointing with his finger towards his daughter.

'Dost thou obey me or not, lord?'

'I surrender myself prisoner to your lordship,' said the princess, coming forward.

'Never, by my knightly honor!' said Lord Esquitl, with indignant feeling.

'Suffer it, my lord,' said the princess, with an imploring look; and she placed herself between two of the men-at-arms.

'Entreat her gently, mind you,' said the emperor to them. 'Conduct her to the palace keep, and bid the jailor on his life see that she suffer no rudeness; for if she be a prisoner, she is no less an emperor's daughter. For you, sir,' he said, as she departed with lord Esquitl and the guard, 'for whose crime I cannot find a name, I will invent for thee a death that shall in some shape measure it. Bear him off to the farthestmost dungeon beneath the water! If he escape, the life of every soldier of the palace guard shall pay for his. Lo, see to it!'

'Without a word, calm and dignified, with only sorrow for the princess' fate shading his countenance with grief, Montezuma was led forth from the oratory, a second time to become the occupant of a dungeon.

The imprisonment of the princess was brief. The emperor, after the first excitement was past, felt all the father return to his bosom, and ere she had been in prison an hour, sent for her to his presence. Lord Esquitl left them alone together in the cabinet. After the lapse of half an hour, the princess returned to her apartment, where sat Tzitzis, trembling, weeping, and terrified. The result of the interview with her father, to judge from the happy yet sad expression of countenance with which she met the tearful, inquiring look of the Peruvian, had not left her quite destitute of hope.

'You are pardoned!' exclaimed the joyful maiden, flying and throwing herself at her feet.

'He has forgiven me, Tzitzis. I have confessed all to him, from the moment I first beheld Montezuma, until now.'

'And what said he?'

It made him more thoughtful than angry, and he put to me many ques-

tions about him,—then shook his head, walked the room, and muttered to himself. I could only hear by piece-meal of "*policy — no male heir myself — security of the empire — noble in person — better for my successor than a noble — Cuiri nor Esquilt merit it — she loves him too — his influence with the body of the people — consolidate the empire!*" — I could hear nothing consecutively. I stood silent by. He seemed to have forgotten my presence.'

'Mark me, my princess, you will yet be happy.'

'I cannot tell, Tzitzis! He kissed me —'

'Who?'

'My father, minion, when I left him—but I trembled when I ventured once to look up into his face, and saw how dark and stern his brow was, notwithstanding this token of love. He was thinking of Montezuma, and of punishment for him. He dare not slay him, for he knows he will slay his child with the same blow!'

'What do you think will be done with him—that is, provided,' she added archly, 'the emperor does not give him to you for a husband?'

'Silence, Tzitzis! *He shall not die!*'

'And if they intend to keep him in prison, woman's wits can get him out,' said the slave resolutely.

'Ere I quitted the cabinet, my father commanded me to meet him in the judgment hall at noon.'

'I augur something from this, your highness!'

'May it be of good,' was the foreboding reply.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE JUDGMENT AND EXECUTION.

At the hour appointed by the emperor to judge the insurgents, the imperial hall of justice was thrown open. On a throne of black marble, with the silver Aztec eagle spreading his wings like a canopy above it, sat the emperor, the sole arbiter and judge of every cause brought before this fearful tribunal,—his word alone the law! with him resting the power of life and death! He was enthroned in grandeur commensurate with his imperial dignity, surrounded by his stately court of gorgeously attired nobles. In his crown blazed a jewel of extraordinary size and wonderful brilliancy, its light being of mingled hues, and its radiance dazzling as the sun. On his left hand, near the throne, a marble slab was elevated above the floor, beside which stood his executioner, resting upon a gigantic sword, bright and gleaming in the sun-beams. Opposite to him stood a man holding a large mantle of crimson cloth. On the right of the throne, a step below the seat of the emperor, on a sort of lesser throne of gold inlaid with pearl, sat the princess Eylla, pale and drooping, yet observant of all that passed. She was attend-

ed by a brilliant galaxy of the ladies of her court. The emperor was stern and silent! and although from time to time she furtively glanced upwards to read his face, its expression foiled her skill to interpret it. It afforded neither hope nor despair.

The monarch now waved his hand, the trumpet sounded, and, loaded with chains, Sismarqui, pale, and with a resigned melancholy air, and Hucha, not less pale, but with an eye flashing haughty defiance around, were led into the judgment hall. The princess looked beyond these to the outer portal, long and eagerly, expecting, she knew not why, that Montezuma would also be brought in to receive his sentence; and if it were to be death, she had prepared herself to die with him there! Ah! for woman's love!

The emperor fixed his eyes sternly upon the two insurgent leaders, as they were guarded to the foot of the throne. Hucha met and returned his gaze so steadily, that his own involuntarily lowered before it. The hunchback's disdainful defiance irrevocably from that moment sealed his own doom. The emperor turned to Sismarqui, who stood before him, bareheaded, and deprived his armor, and with a sad, downcast look; for his untoward fate in losing Fatziza — of himself he thought not — had made him weary of life, and his only hope was that he might die ere he lived to know that she suffered.

'Thy name is Sismarqui,' affirmed, rather than inquired the emperor.

'It is, your majesty.'

'Thou wert a mover and instigator in this revolt of the last night?'

'I was, your majesty,' he answered, firmly.

'For this, thou deservest death. But in consideration of what thou hast suffered through the late prince, and also of the happy end of this revolt, I am willing to display to the people my clemency in pardoning thee, inasmuch, moreover, as the Lord Esquitl hath shown me you took no active part in the rebellion. Thou art pardoned. Go, and by thy future example, lead thy erring fellow-citizens back to their loyalty. Take off his chains.'

Sismarqui looked up surprised. His face, at first, lighted with joy, but was instantly saddened by the recollection, that all he desired in life was lost to him forever. After his chains were removed, he stood, as before, silent and sorrowful.

'Methinks thou shouldst have the grace, slave, to bend the knee, in gratitude for thy life,' said his majesty, displeased.

'Life, your majesty, hath little to lead me to desire it,' answered he, respectfully.

'I need not thy blood. Justice will have a sufficient victim,' he said, looking upon the Hunchback. 'Life hath a thousand springs of enjoyment. Think it not worthless, because one is dried up. Go, and sacrifice to the gods for thine.'

Sismarqui turned slowly away, as if burdened with the life he had hoped to lay down at the foot of the throne; and, leaving the palace, insensibly bent his steps towards the temple that contained the object of his hopeless love.

'My Lord Esquitl,' said the emperor to that young nobleman, who stood not far from the princess, to whose presence sympathy and pity had of late closely attached him.

'Your majesty.'

'This is he of whom you spoke?' and his glance rested on Hucha.

'The same, your majesty.

'He carrieth it in his eye.'

Then, fixing his gaze upon the Hunchback, he said, in a tone of irony,

'So, thy name is Hucha?'

'Your majesty hath been rightly informed,' was the answer.

'Art thou impudent! What set thee upon this revolt, of which thou art a head?'

'Tyranny and oppression!'

'This rings!'

'I am glad I have struck a chime that suits your majesty's ears. How liked your majesty the ringing from the Temple of War the last night?'

'Sir Hunchback,' said the emperor, with surprise, but suppressing his resentment, — feeling, as he cast his eye towards the block, he had full retribution in reserve, — 'I would know of thee, thou art so free a speaker, what hopes tempted thee to this revolt?'

'Of placing thy head where thou wilt soon place mine,' he answered, with a boldness that filled every one with astonishment. It was not the audacity of rash temerity that marked his manner, but of lofty and almost sublime enthusiasm.

'This is plain spoken enow. What complaint have my people to make against the throne? I would heal these wounds before my daughter takes the sceptre, and to do so I must first know the evil.'

'I have told your majesty — tyranny. We are a nation of slaves, trodden upon by a licentious court of tyrannical nobles, who take the pattern for their insolence and oppression from the tyrant himself. We would have made ourselves free, and left open every avenue of distinction and honor to every man, whom the gods give ambition to aspire. We are a nation of slaves — of whom,' he cried, lifting his manacled arms, and clanking his chains loudly, 'with these emblems of bondage upon me, I stand her, the fit representative.'

'Enough. This is doctrine I would not hear too freely spoken, unless I loved anarchy. If thou hast sowed such seed among my subjects, thou hast well earned death.'

'Ignorance, your majesty, is the very pedestal of the throne on which you sit,' he replied, stretching forth his hand towards it.

'I have heard enough. Lead him to the block,' sternly commanded the monarch.

He betrayed no emotion at this sentence; but proudly folding his arms across his breast, walked towards it ere the guard could advance to obey the command of the emperor.

'Nay — Eylla, thou shalt remain,' he said, seeing her rise precipitately. 'If thou canst not witness a traitor's death, thou art not fit to rule an empire that seems rife with them.' She hid her face in her mantle, and silently obeyed.

The Hunchback, on coming to the block, turned to the throne, and said, in a firm voice,

'Has not your majesty seen a seed, which, put in the ground and dying, gives life to a vigorous tree, which bears a myriad like itself? So will my blood spring from the ground.'

'Why do ye delay? Hasten his death. Our very throne shakes with his daring words!'

'Would to the gods my single voice could make it so tremble, as to be felt at the very heart of the empire. Well, headsman, I am ready. Thy sword is bright. Hath it a keen edge? Let me feel it. 'T will do!' he added, after passing his finger over the edge. 'It should be sharp, and thou must strike well, for remember thou art not with thy blow striking off a man's head, but an emperor's crown.'

Thus speaking, he knelt upon the slab of marble beside the block, and, lifting his hands, from which the chains were removed, towards the skies, he cried aloud,

'Oh, thou glorious Deity, who hast created all men equal, take not my spirit from the earth, when it shall leave the body, but diffuse it through the souls of my poor, degraded countrymen, till, inspired with one spirit, they may arise as one man, and wrest from the usurpers of human rights the liberty that is their glorious birthright!'

He cast a calm glance around the hall of judgment, and then resting it for an instant, with proud defiance, upon the emperor, he bared his neck, and calmly laid his head upon the fatal block.

'Strike, executioner!' cried the emperor.

The shining sword glanced in the air, and descended with a dull sound upon the block. The head of the Hunchback rolled to the feet of the executioner, who, holding it up, cried, in a loud voice,

'Thus perish, at the foot of the throne, all who seek to overturn it!' He then placed the head upon the block, and immediately his assistant cast over it and the body the crimson cloth, veiling the scene from every eye. The same instant, the scaffold, with its gory burden, was rolled away from the presence.

'So perish every traitor!' said his majesty, in a firm tone. 'My Lord Esquitl, there is one other prisoner.'

'He is now being conducted into the judgment hall, your majesty.'

The princess started and raised her head, at these words, and fixed her eyes upon the entrance. There was a slight movement among those about it, and a moment afterwards she beheld Montezuma walking, closely guarded, but not in chains, up the hall. Her heart ceased its beating. She held her breath, with the agony of expectation. She sat, like a statue of marble, with her gaze riveted on him. He advanced with a firm step, and a calm and dignified bearing. The emperor, as well as all present, were struck with his noble air and lofty carriage. He looked rather like one who commanded, than one who was a prisoner. He came forward and stood before the throne, his guard standing a step behind him. His glance fell on the princess, and he smiled with such confidence and hope, that her heart felt as if a beam of sun-light had fallen upon it.

The emperor gazed on him a moment, with a look, in which admiration plainly was mingled with deep resentment. At length, without trial, — without even naming his offence, — he gave a parchment to Lord Esquitl, and bade him read it aloud. The Princess Eylla clasped her hands together, and half rose from her seat, in her painful eagerness to hear some fearful doom, till now kept secret from her. Her gaze was riveted on Montezuma, and it seemed as if a word would cause her to spring forward, and throw herself into his arms.

'It is known to all the world,' read the noble, in a voice painfully affected by the distress of the princess, which he observed, and keenly sympathized

with, 'that the dazzling diamond that now adorns the imperial diadem was found, seven centuries since, in the throat of a condor, which fell dead in the court of the palace. From the variety of its hues, and its sun-like splendor, it is supposed to have been brought from the glittering peak of Ix, the Star of the Burning Stone. As diamonds of this class are ever formed in pairs, it has been, it is well known, the ambition of numerous preceding emperors to obtain the mate to this; and it is estimated that more than a million of state's prisoners have perished in the course of ages, in endeavoring to purchase their forfeited lives by reaching the summit. Hitherto, no human foot has trodden it, and the diamond is yet unobtained. Now, inasmuch as Montezuma, son of Mahco, the net-maker, has been adjudged a traitor, he is hereby condemned to be conveyed from hence, closely guarded and in chains, to the foot of the mountain of Ix, and there released. If he do ascend the peak, and return again bringing the mate to this, or a diamond of equal size and beauty, he shall not only be pardoned for his treason and rebellion, but shall receive in marriage the Princess Eylla, and succeed the emperor on the throne. If he shall refuse to purchase life on these terms, he shall die the death by the axe of the executioner.'

'Long live the Emperor Ulyd, just and wise!'

Thrice the trumpets sounded when he had finished reading this proclamation: and amid the acclamations, murmurs of surprise, and adulating shouts of the audience of people, high above which rose the wild shriek of the princess, the emperor dissolved the assembled court, and retired with slow and stately dignity to his cabinet.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ASCENT OF IX.

NIGHT had scarcely began to veil the streets of the capital in gloom, when a private postern that gave access to the wing of the palace occupied by the princess, was cautiously opened, and a female figure came forth, with her mantilla, or *huepilli*, drawn closely about her form, and covering all her face, save one lively eye. But, with all her care, each passer-by knew her to be Tzitzis, the favorite slave of the Princess Eylla.

After surveying the ground about her, to see that she was not observed, she hastily darted across the street into the shadow of the temple, and crossing the bridge swiftly, pursued her way through many windings and across many squares, until she came to the ruins of the Axuzco palace. The moon was just rising as she reached it. With a hesitating, yet resolutely onward pace, she ascended the steps and entered the portal, and swiftly crossed the deserted hall. At its extremity she came to a low door, at which, after hesitating an instant, she knocked. A clear voice, of inexpressible sweet-

ness, bade her enter. She started back with surprise. This portion of the ruins had been for a long time the abode of a fearful woman, who, to many other marvellous sciences, added the knowledge of the secret virtues of all herbs; also, by her art and skill, she could, it was believed, convey death through the eye, and restore life by a breath. She was never visible by day, nor while the moon was above the horizon! Instead, therefore, of hearing the stern voice she expected, she was greatly surprised to hear sounds so sweet inviting her to come in. She opened and entered. Before her, instead of the sorceress, she beheld a bright and beautiful being standing in the light of the rising moon, the level rays of which made their way through a broken casement into the chamber. She would have sunk to the ground for fear. But her smile and pleasant voice, as she said, 'Why do you come hither, pretty maiden?' gave her encouragement.

In a few words, Tzitzis told the tale of the loves of Montezuma and the princess, and the sentence of the emperor. 'Can you show me the weird mother?' she asked, as she ended.

'I am the weird mother, maiden.'

'Nay, sweet lady, trifle not with me! I would see her, if possibly she may not do something for my mistress' love.'

'I tell thee I am the weird mother,' said the spirit-being, sharply. 'When the moonlight is gone, in which I live, as you mortals do in sunlight, as my natural element, I become old and shrivelled, and hideous with age and deformity. When the new moon appears, I sit in its beam, and grow younger and fairer till it is full, when I become youthful and beautiful again, as you see me. The moon wanes from last night, and each day thou wilt find me grow older and older. Alas, mortal maiden! I would I could live for years in youth, like thee, and not thus become old each month.'

'It were better thus to renew youth, even for a day, than, when age has once come upon us, to be unable to cast it off, save in the grave,' answered Tzitzis, between alarm and pity and wonder at what she heard and saw.

'Death, methinks, were a sweet sleep. I can never die!' she said, with a touching melancholy in the tones of her voice that brought tears into the maiden's eyes. 'How I do weep as the moon wanes!'

'Why, when the moon waneth, sweet lady, not seek for life in the sunlight?'

'The beam of the sunlight to me, maiden, would be like a sea of fire to thee! It would consume, but never destroy me.'

'Wilt thou live so forever?'

'No. The day is at hand when my task on earth will be ended. I shall then be dissolved in the element of fire, and, purified, return to the skies. On that day I shall stand in the sun, and, for an instant, be bright as his own glory.' This was said with impressive solemnity. 'But what can I do for thee, pretty one?' she asked, with a smiling countenance. 'Why hast thou sought me?'

'For the aid of your art and wonderful knowledge,' answered Tzitzis, without fear. 'The Princess Eylla, who has sent me hither, hath heard thou wert skilled in all the mysteries of creation, and that to thee are unfolded the hidden springs of life. She now implores you to exert this power in her favor, and that of the noble youth, who will assuredly perish else. Canst thou do nothing for him, sweet lady?' she asked, earnestly.

'The Princess Eylla is gentle, fair, and virtuous! She shall be obeyed.'

She instantly disappeared by a door hitherto unseen by Tzitzis, who remained with her heart throbbing between hope and fear. In a few minutes she returned, and put in her hands a small sealed package, saying —

‘Place this in his hands, and leave the rest for manhood and lofty love to accomplish. I foretold him of this trial. He must first win the throne, and after prove his right to have inherited it. Depart speedily, as thou comest.’

Ere the Peruvian maiden could express her gratitude, or question as to the nature of the contents of the package, she had disappeared.

The succeeding morning, a band of a thousand soldiers marched out of the northern gate of the city; their numbers serving rather to add dignity to their mission, than as necessary to guard the chained prisoner, who moved with a proud step and unbroken bearing in their centre. The first night they encamped within a league of the mountain. The youth slept in his guarded tent, and his dreams were of love and ambition; for a stout heart like his, that loved so truly, did not despair of success, even where his path was over the footsteps of a million who had gone before him, and left their bones bleaching on the mountain side. At midnight, his dreams of Eylla were disturbed by a slight touch on the shoulder. He started, opened his eyes, and beheld an indistinct figure gliding from the tent, without waking the tired and sleeping guards, who doubtless thought their prisoner’s safety sufficiently secured by his heavy chains — and he, at the same moment, discovered that something had been left in his hand. Instinctively, he hastily concealed it in his bosom, and turning over with clanking chains, which roused his guardsmen, once more sank to slumber.

With the rising sun the camp was in motion; and, under a select guard of one hundred men, the prisoner was led to the foot of the mountain, and divested of his chains. Lord Esquilt then embraced him; for he had compassion on his youth and gentleness, and wishing him success, accompanied him a few paces on his way, and bade him farewell.

For the first two miles the ascent was comparatively easy. But at length the young man, of whom the soldiers never lost sight, reached the region of eternal snow, against which his dark form was but just relieved, appearing like a speck which, save that they had continued to keep it in their eye, could not have been detected.

When, after great hardship, Montezuma gained the region of eternal winter, the verge of which, far down the mountain, was artificially whitened with myriads of bleaching bones of those who had perished before him, but the sight of which made him no fainter hearted, he paused to survey the icy pyramid that pierced nearly a league higher into the skies, presenting to the eyes of those below one polished cone of glittering snow, crowned by the starry gem that had burned on its crest from the first day of creation. Notwithstanding the probable fatal end of the attempt, Montezuma, after gazing upward a while, and seeing many fissures in the sides of the glacier invisible to those below, resolved to make it. Lying down on the last spot of verdure to rest his weary limbs, he reposed for an hour, and then, with a bold spirit, and inspiring himself with the thought of the Princess Eylla, he began to scale the icy steep.

He had toiled two hours, and won but a twentieth part of his way, when, as overcome by the cold and exertion, he was about to admit into his mind despairing doubts of success, a small package fell from his bosom, and after sliding down a hundred feet, lodged in a deep cleft of the glacier. It recalled

to his recollection the mysterious visit of the preceding night, which, until now, had not entered his mind; and he rapidly descended to recover it. On opening it, he found a transparent substance, like gum, of a delightful fragrance, enclosed in parchment, on which was written these words —

‘The gum of the herb that containeth the mysterious principle of life! Eat sparingly at morning, noon, and eve, and thy strength shall be as the sun, and neither the four elements, nor the two great principles of heat and cold, shall have power over thee. Child of the Sun, run thy race, and rejoice in thy strength!’

Ready to sink under fatigue and cold, and hitherto just about to give up the further ascent in despair, he placed a small particle of the gum between his lips. It instantly dissolved, and suddenly he felt a new principle of life. The stagnant blood warmed and glowed in his stiffening veins; his heart leaped; his sinews became strong; his spirits cheerful and full of elasticity; and hope and anticipated victory once more filled his soul. He was a new being. He felt the strength of an immortal, and the enduring power of the tireless sun. His first impulse was to spread his hands in gratitude to this visible dispenser of life and heat, who was at that moment descending the western horizon, to light unknown realms beyond its verge. Then carefully replacing the remainder of the gum in his vesture, he sprang up the icy cone with the strength and fleetness of the chamois. Upward, and onward, and still upward, unwearied he kept his skyward way, till the astonished troops below, who had followed him until he appeared like a minute speck on a snow-white spire, could scarcely see him, and soon the distance and twilight veiled him from their view.

Three days and nights they remained encamped at the foot of the mountain, and he did not reappear. His death was then considered certain. The camp was ordered by the nobleman to be struck, and he returned with the soldiers to the capital, to bear the sad intelligence to the princess. The emperor received the news of the failure and death of the bold aspirant for his crown, without surprise; yet there had been a secret hope harbored in his breast that he would succeed. In sending him thither, he had, however, condemned him to a more lingering species of death than he could have received at the axe of the headsman. The princess, though struck with the deepest grief, gave not away to despair, for there was an anchor of hope in her soul, to which she secretly clung.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SACRIFICE.

THE day following the return of the troops that had conducted Montezuma to the Peak of Ix, a third embassy, from the Inca of Peru, who knew of the approaching accession of the princess, chanced to arrive at the court of the emperor, again to propose a union between her and the heir apparent to his throne. Under the existing circumstances, and in the mood in which the monarch was found by the embassy, the proposition, twice before declined, at once met with his approbation. The same objections he had formerly urged, ere he had decided on uniting her to her cousin, still remained, and occurred to his mind; but desirous of securing the princess from farther attachments of a like nature with that from which he believed he had rescued her, and anxious to have this question of succession settled, he did not hesitate to call the ambassadors into his presence, and openly signified his consent to the proposed union. Having thus expressed his approbation, he sent for the princess to appear, and informing her of the proposal of the Inca, commanded her to prepare for the nuptials, to take place by proxy, on the day of her coronation, and also of the annual sacrifice to the Sun. The princess, to his surprise and pleasure, signified her consent and intention to obey her father! Faith was strong in her heart that Montezuma was safe, and she felt that there would be a diversion in her favor ere the fatal hour arrived. If not, she knew that she could die when all hope had expired! She quietly consented, received passively her father's embrace, and left the cabinet.

'Tzitzis,' she said, as she returned to her own apartment; 'I shall in four days either be the bride of Montezuma on earth, or the companion of his bright spirit in the skies.'

'I do feel assured, my princess, that he is safe, and also victorious. I have not forgotten the words of that beautiful lady of moonlight. Believe me, he will soon return triumphant.'

'The gods grant it! but hope, maiden, hath nearly died,' she said, sadly. 'I will prepare for this bridal, for if there be a bridal, and I the bride, the sovereign of my heart shall be the groom! I will be arrayed in my richest robes, and his hovering form shall receive to its arms a spirit-bride!'

'Oh, my sweet princess!' cried Tzitzis with fear, 'thou wilt not take thy life, should he not appear to save you?'

'I said not what I would do, save that I would never become this Inca's bride,' she answered quickly and resolutely. 'Talk to me no more. I do feel sick at heart.'

The bridal day at length arrived. The throne-room, the proudest hall of the imperial palace, was gorgeously decked with banners and hangings of gold and crimson; innumerable stars composed of gems, blazed in the azure dome, in the midst of which was a sun of dazzling gold, the centre of a zodiac of the most brilliant mosaic of precious stones. The columns of the hall that supported the vaulted roof, were of single shafts of porphyry, resting on vast square pedestals of black marble. The pavement was inlaid with costly marbles of various hues, in the most beautiful manner. The

throne itself stood opposite to the main entrance — a creation of gold, silver, and marble! Tall windows of golden colored *itzli* let in the sunlight, which, enriched by the medium through which it was transfused, shed a soft, rich twilight throughout the place.

The pride, pomp, and magnificence of the nobles assembled there, were displayed on this occasion in a degree hitherto unapproached. The emperor stood near his throne, arrayed in imperial purple, and surrounded by his court. On his right was the princess Eylla, in robes of silver silk, her bosom shining with the soft light of priceless pearls, and her bright hair glittering with jewels. Her face was pale, but calm, and in her eye was an expression singular and startling! it was despair united with resolution. Opposite to her stood the Peruvian ambassador, who was to receive the hand of the princess for his prince.

The ceremony was to take place at high noon, in the Temple of the Sun, and the emperor, heading the procession of knights and ladies, nobles and priests, leading the princess by the hand, amid the thunder of martial music, and the acclamations of tens of thousands that lined the arched way, walked to the temple. The vast square before it was living with the multitude, while myriads of gay and gilded barges on the water were filled with spectators of the imposing scene. For this important day witnessed not only the resignation of the sceptre by the emperor, and the coronation of the princess, but also the great annual sacrifice of a virgin to the sun!

The high priest of the sun received the emperor standing in the portal of the temple, surrounded by a train of priests in crimson robes with fringes of gold, and mitres like suns upon their heads. In front of the portal, a few yards distant towered the tall black altar and majestic image of the deity. Before it was the lower altar of sacrifice, surrounded by priests. Seven steps ascended to it on every side. Upon it were laid fascines of bituminous wood, which too plainly showed the purpose to which it was to be devoted.

The high priest, standing elevated at the door of the lofty portal, above the multitude, received the princess from the hand of the emperor, and seated her upon a silver throne, placed on his right hand, while the emperor seated himself upon a throne, a step higher, on his left. The high priest stood beside the princess, and, taking her hand, commanded the Peruvian ambassador to kneel.

The first words of the ceremony had begun to be spoken by the high priest, for the impatient emperor brooked no delay, when the princess sprung to her feet, and drew a dagger from her bosom. It would have been the next instant buried in her heart, if her eye, watchful to the last, had not at the same moment caught sight of a distant plume, the wearer of which was forcing his way wildly through the crowd, which on every side gave way before him with loud and exulting shouts. The arm that held the dagger faltered! — color mounts to her cheek! — the weapon is dashed to the ground, and with a wild shriek of joy she fell senseless into the arms of her father. At the same instant, a young man, magnificently attired in cloth of gold, silk, and purple, like a prince, with a dazzling casque upon his head, on which blazed a wreath of diamonds each of which rivalled in size and splendor that on the imperial diadem, and which was shaded by a snowy plume of the white eagle of the house of Alcohuan, bounded into the space before the two thrones. Close behind him followed a vizored knight, in an ancient but splendid worn court dress, over a suit of armor,

The throng of courtiers about the emperor gave way involuntarily. The foremost, on reaching the temple portal, instantly knelt before the monarch, uncovered his head with one hand, and with the other extended towards him a single diamond of wonderful size and beauty. Every eye that beheld it instantly acknowledged it to be the counterpart of that on the imperial crown.

'Montezuma!' cried a thousand tongues, both of cavalier and bondman.

'I *am* Montezuma,' was the reply of the young man, rising from his bended knee, and glancing proudly around.

The shouts restored the princess to consciousness—to joy—to life! She beheld him living whom she believed dead! She beheld him victorious where death had ever before been conqueror! She was too exquisitely happy to move—to speak. Her heart would have flown to his embrace, yet her eyes, as his softening glance fell on her for whom he had achieved so much, were the only messengers and indices of her overflowing joy and love she could command! The emperor gazed bewildered; he seemed to doubt the convincing evidence of his senses.

I have returned, your majesty,' he said, turning again towards the throne, and speaking with respectful modesty, 'to claim the reward of my success;' and here his glance fell on the princess. 'Behold the twin diamond to that in the imperial diadem upon thy brow.'

As he spoke, he elevated it aloft, in juxtaposition with that on the crown, and held it to every eye in full comparison. A general exclamation from the assembled courtiers acknowledged the resemblance. Montezuma then placed it in the hands of the monarch.

Without a word the emperor rose to his feet, and taking the hand of the trembling and joyful Eylla, he placed it in that of Montezuma. The heart of every one present, not even excepting the emperor himself, as thus the princely pair stood together before the throne, confessed that Nature had formed them for each other, though hitherto Fortune had placed them widely apart. The loud acclamations that hailed this act of the monarch ceased at a wave of his hand. He then thus addressed Montezuma,

'Take her, MONTEZUMA THE FIRST! The word of an emperor is pledged and is redeemed! The deity hath destined thee to become the founder of a new dynasty of kings. Long may thy race live upon the throne, and peacefully reign!'

The high priest then advanced, and while they kneeled together before him, he anointed them with sacred oil, and then joining their hands, performed the simple rite that united them forever.

'May the deity bless you, my children,' he said, lifting above their heads his aged hands. 'The spirit of prophecy tells me that a thousand years will be the end of thy empire! that the last of thy name shall become the slave to a warrior whose advance shall be with the rising sun, and whose coming shall be from a world unknown to us.'

The bride and bridegroom then rose to their feet, and faced the assembled multitude, while the skies shook with the acclamations that hailed their union.

'Now let the sacrifice be offered, for 't is high noon,' said the emperor. 'I will then resign my crown and sceptre, and give to the service of the gods the residue of my life.'

The high priest waved a silver wand, and the temple was suddenly filled

with the sweetest music. It increased in loudness and grandeur, and there were seen, advancing from the interior of the temple, an imposing procession of priests. As it advanced, it was seen to be composed of the numerous companies of priests, that served in the temples of the several deities. Each body, as it came slowly onward, was distinguished by the rich dresses of its order, and by the statue of their god, borne elevated in its midst. They came on to the sound of music, wonderful for its depth and religious majesty. At length was seen a train of virgins in snow-white robes, over which were worn silver cuirasses, and wearing light and beautiful helmets of gold upon their heads. In their midst, beneath a canopy, walked a virgin, veiled to the feet.

The procession issued by a side door, wound past the thrones, and surrounded the altar of sacrifice. The sacrificial priest then descended from the altar, and, receiving the victim from the virgins at the foot of the steps, was about to lead her to the summit, when a youth, haggard, wild, and wretched, in aspect and appearance, rushed through the line of priests, cast himself at her feet, and passionately embraced and kissed them. The virgin shrieked, threw the veil upward from her face, and would have cast herself into his arms. But he was rudely torn from the altar by those around, and the sacrificial priest drew her, struggling, to the top of it.

Fatziza had soon learned that she was regarded as a victim for the altar; but despair and her own misery, with the persuasions of the high priest, who failed not to impress upon her mind the impossibility as well as impiety of returning to the world again, at length led her to passive acquiescence. She went forth, prepared to die. The sight of Sismarqui, with his deep grief and utter misery, broke at once the charm that had lulled her senses. But there was no human aid that could now avail her. The heart of the princess bled for her, and she would have saved her if she could have done so; but she had no power to withhold that which was devoted to heaven. Montezuma started at the shriek, for he believed he recognized it. He nearly fell to the ground when he beheld her face. He had not known of his sister's abduction by the prince, nor her subsequent misery. A prisoner and a victim himself, he had no liberty to aid her, had he known her fate. Alas, Fatziza! without hope — without help even from the gods who were sternly demanding the sacrifice, — she was dragged to the summit, beside the fatal altar. The sacrificial priest now removed her veil entirely, and a murmur of surprise ran from lip to lip, at her wondrous loveliness. He elevated the knife. The next instant, she would have been laid bleeding upon the altar, when, — no one knew whence, — a bright, glorious creature, dazzling as if she had come out of the sun, stood upon the pyre. The arm of the sacrificer was arrested with astonishment.

'Priest, hold!' she cried, in a clear, sweet tone. 'Maiden, thou art free. The gods have sent me to be a victim in thy stead. Hear, oh priests! and thou, high priest of the sun! This day does the sacrifice of virgins cease forever. The gods have accepted my one sacrifice for that of all virgins, from this time forward. Young man,' she cried to Sismarqui, 'lead the maiden from the altar, and to the priest of the sun. Emperor!' she said, turning towards the surprised and awed monarch, 'thou hast but fulfilled the decrees of destiny this day. He, to whom thou hast given the hand of the princess, is as royal as thyself. In him you behold the true heir of the last Mexilian king, whom heaven hath kept to this day, for the restoration of the

empire of the Mexitili, which, for the sins of its kings, hath been punished for seven hundred years. The book of destiny is sealed again for a thousand years! Then new gods shall be worshipped on thy altars, and temples shall be dedicated to a virgin, instead of condemning her, a victim upon its altars. Priest! behold thy sacrifice. Heaven receive the oblation!’

Instantly the altar-pyre was supernaturally enveloped in lambent flame, which, after burning a moment, separated from the altar, and ascended with her, as it were, a chariot with eagles towards the sun, till lost to the eye in the dazzling glory of its noon-tide blaze.

The emperor then turning to Montezuma, said,

‘Noble prince! May Heaven, that hath so many centuries kept your race in exile and obscurity, preserve you now that they have restored you to the throne. Thy sister is full fair,’ he said, as the rescued virgin threw herself upon Montezuma’s neck. ‘This Sismarqui should prove at least noble now.’

‘I will make him noble, your majesty,’ said Montezuma. ‘Come hither, Sismarqui. There is my sister’s hand. Kneel both, and let the high priest perform for thee the kind office he hath done for me.’

One tremulous moment of mingled awe and delight, kneeling together, hand in hand, beneath the uplifted hands of the priest, repaid both for all past suffering.

‘Now, we will return to the throne-room, where I will resign my crown and sceptre to my children, and bury the vexing cares of state forever in oblivion.’

The throne-room again was thronged, presenting, with its assembled courtiers, a similar appearance to that which it exhibited before the procession moved to the temple. But now, the emperor was seated on his throne, with his sceptre in his right hand, and his crown upon his head. Montezuma and the princess were standing before it. Silence reigned over the multitude. The emperor rose with dignity from the throne, and descended three steps, and taking the princess by the hand, led her to it. He also conducted Montezuma, and placed him beside her. Then, kneeling down, he removed the crown from his head, and placed it, with his sceptre, upon a cushion before the throne. Elevating the cushion in his hands towards heaven, he said, solemnly,

‘From thee, shade of my imperial sire, I received this diadem and sceptre. Behold, I have fulfilled my destiny. I now transmit them to the successor the gods have given me, even as I received them from thee.’

Thus speaking, he rose and put the crown upon the head of Montezuma, and placed the sceptre in his right hand.

‘Receive, Montezuma the First, these symbols of empire. As I leave them to thee, as I received them from my predecessor, so keep them as a sacred trust to those who come after thee. May heaven bless thee, Emperor Montezuma and Empress Eylla, and make your reign long and prosperous.’

‘Hail, Montezuma the First!’ cried the assembled nobles, and the cry flew from palace to square, and from square to street, till the vast city rung with the universal acclamation.’

‘Hail, Montezuma the First!’ cried the knight, who had appeared before the temple with him, advancing to the throne. Kneeling down, he raised his visor, laid his drawn sword at the feet of the young emperor, and added, in a loud, firm voice,

'I, Atelole, Lord Axusco, swear to counsel thee with wisdom, defend thee with valor, and honor thee with my life and death, if need be, even as my fathers did for thy fathers. So help me, the sacred gods of Mexitili! Hail! Emperor and King!'

'Art thou, Lord Axusco, come to life?' cried the emperor, with amazement.

'From Peruvian exile, your majesty,' answered the knight, smiling.

The emperor looked at him for a moment, shook his head, and turned and left the throne-room, and shortly afterwards the palace forever.

Montezuma now rose with dignity, and dissolved the assembly, first receiving, however, the defiance of the Peruvian ambassador, in the name of his insulted master, the Inca, for the discourtesy done both himself and the prince, his son, by the breaking off of the contract of espousals.

The descendants of Montezuma and Eylla, for many centuries, continued to fill the throne with honor, until the last bearer of the proud name lost his power, his empire, and his life, by the hands of an invader, 'whose coming was from the rising sun,' and whose pathway was deluged in blood.

END.

